

ASSERTIVENESS PREDICTS SELF-ESTEEM, ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, AND STRESS: A STUDY OF KASHMIRI ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: The adolescence period holds a special significance because this period marks multi-developmental changes in an individual. The present study was conducted to find out the association between assertiveness, self-esteem, academic achievement and stress among the students.

Methodology: Correlational design was employed for the present research. Participants of the study comprised 120 high school students with an equal number of male and female students and the age range of 12 to 19 years. The scales used for data collection are namely-Rathus assertiveness schedule (RAS), Rosenberg self-esteem (RSE), perceived stress scale (PSS), and academic achievement scale.

Main Findings: Correlation coefficient and hierarchical regression were employed as statistical techniques. Hierarchical regression analysis indicated in step one that gender and residence predicted 15.50 percent of the total variance in self-esteem while in step two assertiveness predicted 00.30 percent of change in self-esteem. The findings also reported that gender and residence predicted 04.00 percent of the total variance in academic achievement while in step two, assertiveness predicted 01.40 percent of a total change in academic achievement. In another finding, gender and residence predict 19.60 percent of a total change in stress while in step two assertiveness predicted 00.30 percent of change in stress.

Applications of this study: The findings of the study exhibit that assertiveness has little role in predicting factors such as self-esteem and academic achievement. Implications: Further researches may be conducted to figure out the correlates possess significant magnitude to state about self-esteem, academic achievement,, and level of stress.

Novelty/Originality of this study: The study is the first of its kind among the students in a conflict-ridden area of Kashmir and comparative in nature to add to the existing knowledge.

Keywords: Assertiveness, Self-esteem, Stress, Academic Achievement, Adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescents are the future leaders and guardians of a nation's development. According to the [UNICEF report \(2011\)](#), 1.2 billion adolescents stand at the crossroads between childhood and adulthood world and around 234 million of them live in India. About one-quarter of India's population are adolescents. The word adolescence is derived from the Latin verb 'adolescere' which means "to grow into maturity". Adolescence is marked from ten years to nineteen years of age of a human beings' life span characterized by various physiological and psychological changes ([World Health Organization, 2014](#)).

It is a crucial period of life span which has not been fully understood by the parents, teachers and society as a whole. The increase in attention towards adolescents is due to the recognition of this group as a significant proportion of the total population. Adolescence is the period where adolescents establish their social positions and are exposed to a wide range of new social situations. They come into contact not only with friends but also with other people to learn and develop new social roles without the direction of their parents ([Ingles, Hidalgo & Mendez, 2005](#)). It is characterized by rapid physical growth, significant emotional, psychological and spiritual changes. In fact, it is the most sensitive and critical period of life for the development of lifelong perceptions, beliefs, values, and practices. Adolescents struggle with the developmental tasks of establishing an identity, becoming a contributing member of society and selecting a vocation ([Ansari & Stock, 2010](#)). Thus it plays an important role in one's psychosocial development.

Before adulthood, it is important for an adolescent to develop healthy self-esteem. Self-esteem is defined by [Rosenberg \(1965\)](#) as- "totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings with reference to himself as an object." According to [Smith and Mackie \(2007\)](#) - "The self-concept is what we think about the self, self-esteem is the positive or negative evaluation of the self, as in how we feel about it." It predicts academic achievement ([Marsh, 1990](#)), happiness and relationships ([Orth & Robbins, 2014](#)) of an individual. The problems faced during adolescence have a great impact on self-esteem and academic achievement. Academic achievement is a remarkable milestone in the educational life of adolescents. It is defined by [Good \(1973\)](#) as- "accomplishment or proficiency of performance in a given skill or body of knowledge." It is mostly reported after a continuous examination of any individual. However, its assessment is based on the grounds of skills or procedural knowledge and facts or declarative knowledge.

Adolescence is also a crucial period for the development of assertiveness. It is an important social skill that promotes personal well-being. Accepted as a way of communication, assertiveness is defined as "a person's protecting his/her own

rights without sneering and damaging those of others, and expressing his/her thoughts, emotions and beliefs in a direct, honest and proper way” ([Kisac&Yesilyaprak, 1999](#)). Equipping individuals with assertiveness when an adolescent forms a new identity helps them develop relationships with others without any conflict and achieve better mental health.

The term stress refers to strain or pressure. In human beings level of psychological stress increases when the situation is perceived as unmanageable, having the least control over consequences and difficulty in coping ([Folkman, 2013](#)). It is affected by various personal, familial, social and environmental factors. Higher levels of psychological stress, often called distress leads to physical and mental health, personal, occupational and social life towards negative consequences rather than positive. Learning adaptive stress coping strategies further may lead to the effective management of life situations and also lessen the possibility of physical and mental illnesses.

The development of assertive communication skills and stress coping strategies is greatly affected by the social and political environment of that region. In India, Kashmir also is known as the ‘paradise on earth’; nature’s finale of beauty is a masterpiece of earth’s creation of charm and loveliness. Besides this, it is also a traumatized state of India, approximately from the last 60 years. The uncertainty at the social and political levels has socially & psychologically affected all the age groups and in particular the adolescent generation of the state. Moved by the crucial conditions in Kashmir; the present research is conducted to study self-esteem, academic achievement, assertiveness and stress level of adolescents residing there.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The self-esteem of an adolescent is an important contributor to his/her growth and development. Previous studies show that assertive people have high self-esteem. Adolescents showing a high level of assertiveness are also having a high level of self-esteem ([Tagay, Önen&Canpolat, 2018](#)). The impact of assertiveness training on the level of self-esteem has been examined in various studies and showed mixed findings. Some studies reported that assertiveness training increases the level of self-esteem. These findings are reported by many researchers ([Shimizu, Shinya, Mishima& Nagata, 2009](#); [Akbari, Mohammadi&Sadeghi 2012](#); [Tannous, 2015](#); [Kashani&Bayat 2010](#); [Niaraki&Rahimi, 2013](#); [Yadav & Iqbal, 2009](#)). But some studies reported no change in self-esteem after the assertiveness training ([Gulsah, 2003](#)). Such a contradiction necessitates more studies.

Self-esteem and assertiveness are significantly related to stress level because assertiveness is contributing to self-esteem and self-esteem are being predictive of stress ([Petrie & Rotheram, 1982](#)). Various researches have observed mixed findings of assertiveness and stress levels. Some researches show that there is a positive association between assertiveness and stress ([Eldeeb, Eid & Eldosoky, 2014](#)), while others pointed out that difficulty in asserting oneself is often positively associated with stress levels throughout one’s life. Other researchers reported that assertiveness training decreases the level of stress ([Lee & Crockett 1993](#); [Eslami, Rabei, Afzali, Hamidizadeh&Masoudi 2016](#)). Several findings depicted that assertiveness training increases assertiveness among students ([Leone & Gumaer 1979](#); [Nadim 1995](#); [Galassi, Litz&Galassi 1974](#); [Perkins & Kemmerling 1983](#)) and also prepare them to advocate for themselves and work to resolve interpersonal conflicts ([Buell & Snyder, 1981](#); [Paglia& Room, 1999](#); [Lane Wehby& Cooley, 2006](#); [Wolfe, Crooks, Chiodo, Hughes, & Ellis, 2012](#)). Literature also revealed that assertiveness and anxiety are negatively related ([Abdel & Ghareeb, 1995](#)). Such contrary findings give us the needed scope to emphatically explore the relationship between assertiveness and stress level.

The higher level of stress may lead the adolescents to approach maladaptive coping styles which are harmful in longer terms for example- drug abuse, internet addiction, gaming addiction, social isolation due to excessive use of internet called - phubbing. Assertiveness is a significant predictor of internet addiction and phubbing behavior in adolescents ([Dalbudak, Euren, Aldemir, Taymur, Evren & Topcu 2015](#); [Paramaskiz, 2019](#)). An influence of assertiveness training and family psychosocial therapies is seen on the resilience of adolescents and is found helpful in the prevention of drug uses in boarding schools ([Ramdhan, Keliat & Wardani, 2019](#)).

To become a successful individual in all aspects of life especially in academics, assertiveness is very crucial. Several studies related to assertiveness and academic achievement exhibit contradictory findings. Some studies indicated that assertiveness is positively associated with academic achievement ([Ghobri & Hejazi, 2007](#); [Kannan, 2013](#); [Mahmoud & Hamid, 2013](#); [Ghodrat, Tavakori, Heydari & Akbarzadeh, 2016](#)) while other studies depict no significant relation between assertiveness levels and academic success of students ([Margarin, 2009](#); [Sibel, Gunyeli & Caglar 2012](#)). The significant negative association between assertiveness and academic performance of students is also reported ([Mousavi, Ebrahimi & Bakhshipour, 2014](#)).

[Binige \(2012\)](#) conducted a study in Ghana and reported that a healthy social environment is crucial for assertiveness. Harmony in familial relationships, sense of belongingness, combining political and social organizations in looking after teenagers, satisfying needs of these youth lay a foundation in the development of youngsters that can cope with life challenges efficiently and effectively, hence they become assertive.

In comparison to the rest of India, adolescents of Kashmir have repeatedly reported their serious psychological and social difficulties as a result of the ongoing violence and deprivation during the last few years. The political conflict has become a roadblock in the development of Kashmiri adolescents ([Calhoun & Tedeschi 2006](#); [Amin & Khan 2009](#)). [Sofiya \(2012\)](#)

asserted in her study that adolescents of Kashmir exhibit frustration because of the political conflict which has not only choked the voice of youth but also increases the suicide rate among them. [Malla \(2019\)](#) stated that the social and political situations in Kashmir are contributing factors to higher drug use in adolescents. Alike other parts of the country Internet addiction is also a prevalent problem in urban and rural areas of Kashmir and is directly related to well-being ([Rehman, Shafi & Rizvi, 2016](#)). [Bhat, Wani, and Chakrawarty \(2017\)](#) conducted a study on one thousand college students from three most violence-affected districts of Kashmir due to armed-conflict and found the higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder in them. Sound mental health, as well as functioning, is very challenging in these conditions.

While Kashmiri adolescents are facing prolonged unstable conditions politically and socially, it may have an impact on their schooling and academic achievement too. Findings from some studies are showing a correlation between academic achievement, study habits, social maturity, self-concept and emotional intelligence ([Ilahi & Khandai, 2015](#); [Mushtaq & Rani, 2016](#); [Parveen, Malik & Aziz, 2012](#)). Some studies focus on the academic achievements of students based on the residential area and gender ([Wani, 2013](#)). Examining various variables all the studies indicate the conflicting conditions of Kashmir as an important factor directly or indirectly affecting the academic achievement of students.

Ongoing conflicts, uncertainty, and insecurity often affect the development of self-esteem and the level of stress in adolescents. Similar findings for self-esteem are reported in a study conducted on adolescents in Kashmir ([Var, Paul, Kumar & Shah, 2011](#)). Being a key factor in social development lack of self-esteem may lead to varying patterns of assertiveness and thus modulate the handling of stressful situations in day to day life. So, self-esteem, assertiveness, and academic achievement are not only correlated but they regulate stress coping abilities. That's why these three domains tend to be crucial for the holistic growth of a new generation. Kashmir has always been a focal point for the world media as major reports show concern for the consequences of a stressful environment including mental health and education ([The Economic Survey Report, 2016](#)). But there is a paucity of research related to self-esteem especially in context to assertiveness in Kashmiri youth. Keeping the fact in mind the relation between self-esteem and assertiveness will be assessed in the present study. Also, some studies have reported the challenges in the way of high academic achievement in Kashmir valley and especially for girls ([Parveen, Malik & Aziz, 2012](#); [Wani, 2013](#); [Ilahi & Khandai, 2015](#); [Mushtaq & Rani, 2016](#)). However, there is still a need to examine the relationship between self-esteem, assertiveness and academic achievement of adolescents.

Aforesaid studies show that an increase in assertiveness leads to efficient and adaptive stress-coping through assertiveness training, in India and abroad. To know the scope of assertiveness training for Kashmiri youth, we must first know the relation between stress and assertiveness. But again there is a dearth of research stating these associations in Kashmiri adolescents. So the aim of the study is to examine the association between assertiveness, self-esteem, academic achievement and stress level among the adolescents of Kashmir.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Kashmir also known as the 'paradise on earth, nature's finale of beauty is a masterpiece of earth's creation of charm and loveliness. Besides this, it is also a traumatized state from the last 60 years. The uncertainty in the state at the social and political levels has mostly affected all the age groups and in particular the adolescent generation socially & psychologically. As adolescence is a period of major transitions, developments, and growth in one's life. Hence any remarkable change during this age has an effect on the individual's outlook towards life.

Adolescents of Kashmir have repeatedly reported their serious psychological and social difficulties as a result of the ongoing violence and deprivation during the last few years. The political conflict has become a roadblock in the development of Kashmiri adolescents ([Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006](#); [Amin & Khan, 2009](#)). [Sofiya, \(2012\)](#) asserted in her study that adolescents of Kashmir exhibit frustration because of the ongoing conflict which has not only choked the voice of youth but also increases the suicide rate among them. The present study was conducted to examine the association between assertiveness, self-esteem, academic achievement and stress among the adolescents of Kashmir.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To find out the association of assertiveness with self-esteem, academic achievement and stress among adolescents.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

- There will be a positive relationship between assertiveness and self-esteem among adolescents.
- There will be a positive relationship between assertiveness and academic achievement among adolescents.
- There will be a negative relationship between assertiveness and stress among adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

The research design for the present study is correlational design. A convenience sampling technique was used for data collection.

Participants

Total 120 students were selected divided into two groups i.e. 60 male and 60 female. Among 120 students 30 boys and 30 girls were belonging to rural areas and the remaining 60 students (30 boys and 30 girls) belong to urban areas of Kashmir. The age range of the participants was 12-19 years.

Tools / Measurement

The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (1978): It is a standardized tool developed by Rathus (1978) comprising 30 situational statements for which the subject is asked to rank the degree to which each statement is characteristic and descriptive of his/her behavior (-3 to +3) yielding a total assertiveness score between -90 (least assertive) and + 90 (most assertive). The tool was administered individually to each student. Cronbach's alpha was high ($r = 0.84$).

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES): The Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale comprises of a 10-item that is based upon satisfaction of one's self and life. The scale consists of five positive items and five negative items. The four-point Likert scale is used to answer items ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The internal consistency ranges from 0.77 to 0.88 with test-retest reliability ranges from 0.82 to 0.85. The scale ranges from 0-30. (0<15 low self-esteem), (15: 25 within the normal range of self-esteem), (+25 high self-esteem).

Perceived Stress Scale: 10 item version developed by Cohen (1983). It is a self-report scale designed to measure the perception of stress. The scale consists of 10-items. Each item is answered on a 5-point scale. The Cronbach's coefficient was 0.86 and Test-retest reliability was 0.85. Higher scores correspond to a higher level of perceived stress.

Academic Achievement: This scale developed by Anderson, Guan & Koc (2016), measures the academic adjustment of the student. This scale represents three components/ three-dimensional construct of academic adjustment which is an academic lifestyle, academic achievement, and academic motivation and it comprises 9 items. Responses are elicited on a five-point scale. The test-retest reliability of the academic adjustment is 0.84. The academic achievement dimension of the scale was used for the work.

Data Analysis: Pearson's correlation and Hierarchical regression were applied to analyze the data.

Table 1: The correlation coefficients of (Self-esteem, academic achievement, and stress) with (Gender, residence, and assertiveness)

	Self-esteem	Academic achievement	Stress
Gender	.331**	.093	.384**
Residence	.212*	.189*	.219*
Assertiveness	.086	.160	-.157

The above table shows that though gender is weakly associated with self-esteem and stress the results have found to be highly significant (.01 level). Results also depicted that gender is correlated with academic achievement but it is not significant. The correlation of residence with self-esteem, academic achievement and stress also show a weak but significant association (.05 level). Table 1 also revealed that assertiveness shows a positive correlation with self-esteem and academic achievement, however, it is negatively correlated with stress.

Table 2: Hierarchical Regression analysis for (Gender, Residence, and Assertiveness) as a predictor and (Self-esteem, Academic achievement, and Stress) as criterion variables

Demographics	Self-Esteem		Academic Achievement		Stress	
	Step-1	Step-2	Step-1	Step-2	Step-1	Step-2
Gender	-.331	-.320	-.093	-.070	.384	.374
Residence	.212	.222	-.189	-.171	.219	.210
Predictor						
Assertiveness		.060		.121		-.054
Overall R ²		.155		.044		.196
Adjusted R ²		.136		.034		.178
R ² Change		.003		.014		.003
F	10.70***	7.26***	2.72	2.38	14.23***	9.57***

*** Significant at .001 level, **Significant at .01 level, * Significant at .05 level.

The model summary of regression analysis (Table-2) reveals that in step-one gender and residence predicted 15.50 percent of the total variance in self-esteem while in step-two assertiveness predicted around 0.30 percent of change in self-esteem. Moreover, the findings also reported that gender and residence predict only 04.00 percent of the total variance in academic achievement while in step two; assertiveness predicted 01.40 percent of the total change in academic achievement. In another finding, gender and residence predict 19.60 percent of a total change in stress while in step two assertiveness predicted 0.30 percent of change in stress.

DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS

The present study was done to assess the relationship of assertiveness with self-esteem, academic achievement, and stress among the adolescents of Kashmir. It is evinced from the findings that there is a weak positive correlation between assertiveness and self-esteem. Many researchers have reported similar findings ([Kutlu, Buzlu, Sever, Batmaz, & Pektekin, 1997](#); [Yilmaz, 2000](#); [Karagozoglu, Kahve, Koc, & Adamisoglu, 2008](#)). However, few other researchers have ascertained that there is a moderate correlation between self-esteem and assertiveness ([Maheshwari & Gill, 2015](#); [Yamagishi, 2007](#)). The possible reasons for the positive relationship between assertiveness and self-esteem may be that assertive persons are able to maintain positive mental states, due to their capability to efficiently manage their situations and emotions. The present study findings also suggest that the conditions of Kashmiri adolescents are different as compared to other adolescents of the country. The adolescents of Kashmir are facing the problems of social inferiority, insecurity, lack of affiliation, isolation, violence etc. It is an established fact that individual differences and cultural characteristics play an influential role in the level of assertiveness. Furthermore, hierarchical regression analysis revealed that the combination of independent variables (gender, residence & assertiveness) produces little change in the self-esteem of adolescents.

The second hypothesis that assertiveness and academic achievement are positively correlated was also supported in the study. The findings are consistent with previous studies reporting a positive correlation between these two variables ([Mahmoud & Hamid, 2013](#); [Ghodrati et al. 2016](#); [Kannan, 2013](#); [Ghobri & Hejazi, 2007](#)). On the other hand, a few other findings depicted no significant relation ([Sibel et al. 2012](#); [Margarin, 2009](#)). While some studies have reported a significant negative correlation between assertiveness and academic success of students ([Montserrat, Martin, Angel, Martinez & Marcela, 2012](#); [Mousavi et. al. 2014](#)). Thus, it may be inferred that assertiveness has varied influences in terms of a student's academic achievement. In certain situations, it appears to be an enhancer, on the contrary, it is observed to have a diminishing influence as well. The findings may be interpreted in light of the social responses towards assertive behavior. Assertiveness may not always find unconditional acceptance in terms of the people involved in a particular social setting. In addition to that, the regression analysis findings also show a little role of assertiveness in academic achievement. The reason may be that the adolescents of Kashmiri youth lack opportunities, career options and awareness. So they failed to pay proper attention to their studies. In fact, the problems of rural youth go unnoticed until the problems get severe. School setups also contribute to academic performance. Along with it, curfews, unrests and violent acts can cause disturbances in proper schooling due to changes and irregularities in school schedule and loss of school infrastructure. Reports by various agencies show that the education sector has been badly hit in Kashmir Valley due to unrests which have caused irreversible loss to students ([The Economic Survey Report, 2016](#)). Thus it may be inferred that there might be many other factors contributing to the academic achievement of Kashmiri adolescents in addition to assertiveness.

The third hypothesis of the study is also retained as assertiveness is negatively correlated with stress. This notion is also supported in previous studies ([Galassi, et al. 1974](#); [Perkins and Kemmerling, 1983](#); [Leone & Gumaer, 1979](#); [Nadim, 1995](#)). This may be interpreted in the light of the fact that being assertive, leads a person towards better mental health by making him/her real and true to one's own feelings and opinions. Being upfront may not always gain the approval of others particularly in the Indian scenario. Therefore, the findings reported by other researchers that there exists a positive correlation between assertiveness and stress levels ([Eldeeb, Eid & Eldosoky, 2014](#)) is also understandable. While [Fensterheim \(1975\)](#) pointed out assertive difficulties are often positively associated with stress levels throughout one's life. In addition to that hierarchical analysis revealed that assertiveness has not so much role to produce a change in stress. There might be several other factors affecting the relationship between assertiveness and stress e.g. insecurity, violence, unemployment, emotional problems (depression, anxiety, anger, grief, guilt, and low self-esteem), traumatic events, etc.

Along with these findings, other demographic correlates are also noteworthy to pay attention to. The findings depicted a significant correlation between gender and self-esteem. It means that both genders have different levels of self-esteem. These findings are in line with [Fanaja, Melonashia, Shkemia \(2015\)](#) who reported that gender and self-esteem are significantly correlated. [Naderi, Abdullah, Aizen, Sharir & Kumar \(2009\)](#) also reported that gender has a strong unique effect on student's self-esteem. Thus, we can say that sex differences in self-esteem are connected to sex stereotypes that go from preadolescence to adulthood. Besides, [Katz and Ksiansnak \(1994\)](#) had explained that gender differences are associated with both the biological differences and the socialization process. However, the findings also depicted a significant correlation between gender and stress.

When the data were analyzed with respect to residence, it was depicted that there was a weak but significant correlation between residence and self-esteem. This finding is supported in previous studies ([Mamat, 2016](#); [Joshi & Shrivastava, 2009](#)) but is contradictory ([Peyrovi, Ghezlbash, Ghorbani, Inanloo, Alizadeh & Haghani, 2012](#)) who reported that there was not a

statistically significant relationship between self-esteem and gender. Thus, it may be inferred that urban students are having higher self-esteem as compared to rural ones. It seems that rural adolescents are facing more difficulty in their family, school/college, social, and personal/oversensitivity areas than urban adolescents. The prevailing condition in Kashmir, especially in rural areas has led to a sense of uncertainty among adolescents. Rural area lacks the opportunities, career options and awareness which increases the sense of problems as compared to their urban counterparts. Moreover, it also seems that residence is significantly correlated with stress and academic achievement. The findings supported in previous studies who reported that residence plays a significant role in academic achievement ([Parveen, Malik & Aziz, 2012](#); [Wani, 2013](#); [Ilahi & Khandai, 2015](#); [Mushtaq & Rani, 2016](#)).

CONCLUSION

The present study was aimed to determine the relationship of assertiveness with self-esteem, academic achievement, and stress among Kashmiri adolescents. The findings supported that assertiveness is positively correlated with self-esteem and academic achievement. Also, the findings confirmed that assertiveness and stress are negatively correlated. From the above findings, it was concluded that assertiveness plays a role in the development of self-esteem, academic achievement and level of stress among students. It was also evinced from the findings that demographic variables cannot be ruled out completely. Residence, gender has an effect and it is clearly visible via findings of the present study. The findings of the study are expected to come up with new insights into the nature and dynamics of the association of assertiveness, self-esteem, academic achievement and stress among adolescence of Kashmir.

However, some preventive steps may be introduced at high schools for students with academic problems. Also, some intervention techniques (assertiveness training) can be introduced especially in a school setting for increasing the assertiveness level, self-esteem, academic achievement and to reduce the stress level of the students to a greater extent.

LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

The present study gives some suggestions for future researchers, who are interested to conduct research in the same area. The sample size of the present study is limited to only 120 students taken from only two schools, so future researches should employ a large sample size. Secondly to explore the relationship between given variables one cannot ignore the vital role of other crucial demographic variables. Hence account should be taken of identification and exploration of crucial demographic variables that have a direct effect on this relationship. To have some heterogeneity sample should be taken from different districts of Kashmir so that we may better understand the problems of the adolescents of Kashmir. In addition to that some demographic factor e.g. socio-economic status, parent's education, parents' job may be included in future studies.

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