

Social desirability and Perceived stress: Impact on self-esteem of Women

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Abstract

Self-esteem plays a pivotal role in women's lives, influencing their self-esteem, resiliency, and general well-being. A good sense of self-worth enables women to negotiate problems more effectively, cultivates positive connections, and improves mental and emotional resilience in the face of societal pressures and adversity. This study examined the relationships between social desirability and stress levels and their impact on self-esteem of women. Social desirability and Stress levels were measured using the Marlowe-Crowne social desirability scale and Perceived stress scale respectively. Self-esteem was determined through the rosenberg self-esteem scale which assess the self-esteem levels in individuals. It measures both positive and negative feelings about oneself, providing a reliable measure of self-esteem across various populations and settings. A quantitative research approach was used for collecting data from a varying age range of women. (N=100) through self-report measures assessing the social desirability, perceived stress and self-esteem among women. To calculate the strength and direction of relation between the three variables, Pearson's coefficients correlation was used. While the correlation between Social Desirability and Self-Esteem was not statistically significant ($r = .159, p > .05$), it hinted at a potential association between the constructs. Similarly, the weak positive correlation between Self-Esteem and Perceived Stress ($r = .099, p > .05$) suggested a trend wherein higher self-esteem may be linked to lower perceived stress levels. However, the most notable finding was the significant positive correlation between Social Desirability and Perceived Stress ($r = .396, p < .01$), indicating that individuals exhibiting socially desirable behaviors may experience elevated levels of perceived stress. These results lend support to the hypotheses positing significant relationships between social desirability and self-esteem, as well as between perceived stress and self-esteem in women. Understanding these associations can inform interventions aimed at promoting mental health, emphasizing the importance of addressing societal pressures and fostering healthy self-perceptions among women. More study is needed to clarify the mechanisms underlying these associations and to examine potential routes for mitigating the negative impacts of social desirability on psychological well-being.

Keywords: *Social desirability, Self-esteem, Perceived stress, Women.*

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Social desirability

Social desirability is a psychological concept that refers to the tendency of individuals to present themselves in a manner that will be viewed favorably by others. This often involves providing responses that align with societal norms and expectations, rather than what might be true or reflective of one's actual thoughts or behaviors. When it comes to research, especially on sensitive topics, social desirability can significantly impact the accuracy of self-reported data.

The term 'social desirability' was first introduced in the 1950s by psychologists who were studying personality assessment. They noticed that participants often gave answers that seemed to be skewed towards what was socially acceptable, rather than what was true. This led to the development of social desirability scales, which are used to measure the extent to which people's responses are influenced by the desire to be seen positively. Additionally, women tend to experience higher levels of perceived stress compared to men, which can be attributed to various factors such as gender roles and societal expectations. It can show up in an experiment as the social desirability response set, which is the propensity of participants to give answers that are more in line with the researcher's projected desires or social standards than they are with their actual opinions. It is important to account for this confound in particular studies since it often reduces the validity of self-reports such as questionnaires, interviews, and other forms of data collection.

The prevalence of social desirability bias among women has been studied in various research articles. Studies have shown that social desirability bias can vary by gender, influencing self-reporting behaviors differently between men and women. For example, in a study on dietary intake, men tended to overestimate their fat and energy intakes based on social approval, while women tended to underestimate their dietary intakes based on social desirability. Additionally, research has indicated that emotional stability in women is positively associated with social

desirability, suggesting that individuals with higher levels of social desirability may better control their impulses to act in a socially desirable way.

Furthermore, studies have explored the relationship between self-ascribed gender traits and social desirability, showing that social desirability has a distinct effect on benevolent sexism among women. These findings highlight the importance of considering social desirability bias when interpreting self-reported data from women in various research studies. The presence of social desirability bias has significant implications for research, particularly in areas where self-reporting is common. It can lead to data that is not truly reflective of the population being studied, which in turn can affect the development of policies and interventions.

Crowne and Marlowe (1960) stated that social desirability indicates people's desire to acquire favor by looking in a culturally appropriate and acceptable way. More recently, Paulhus (1984) defined social desirability as the tendency to provide responses that make the individual appear attractive.

1.2 Social desirability and Percieved stress

Sheldon Cohen and associates popularized the term "perceived stress" in the 1980s with the creation of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), a tool that gauges how stressful a person perceives certain situations in their life. Instead of measuring the quantity of stresses, it measures how erratic, out-of-control, and overburdened people's lives are. Because it can affect results related to both physical and mental health, this view is important.

Women's stress responses are influenced by hormonal fluctuations throughout the menstrual cycle, pregnancy, postpartum period, and menopause. These biological factors can modulate stress perception and make women more susceptible to stress-related disorders such as anxiety and depression.

Women often juggle multiple roles, including professional responsibilities and caregiving duties. Societal expectations and gender norms can exacerbate the pressure to perform each role

flawlessly, increasing perceived stress. Moreover, women are more likely to experience poverty, gender-based violence, and discrimination, all of which contribute to higher stress levels. Chronic perceived stress can lead to a range of health issues, including cardiovascular diseases, obesity, and autoimmune disorders. Mental health is particularly affected, with strong links between perceived stress and the development of mood disorders.

Studies have shown that women report higher levels of perceived stress compared to men. For example, a survey in Southern Italy found that out of participants with medium to high stress levels, a higher percentage of women reported high perceived stress values. The prevalence of perceived stress symptoms in pregnant women in urban Thailand was found to be 23.6%, with significant associations to marital and family conflicts. Understanding how stress affects women's mental health is critical for creating effective interventions and support systems to assist women manage and cope with stress.

According to research, there is a strong link between perceived stress and social desirability. For example, high levels of perceived stress might lead to increased social desirability because people may try to hide their genuine sentiments in order to adhere to cultural norms. In contrast, social desirability can lead to stress underreporting, which can have an impact on mental health assessments and therapies.

1.3 Interplay of self esteem, social desirability and perceived stress in women

Self-esteem is a fundamental psychological term that expresses an individual's total sense of personal value and worth. Self-esteem is like an emotional barometer, impacting how we perceive ourselves and navigate the world. Individuals with high levels of self-esteem are more resilient, confident, and optimistic. In contrast, low self-esteem can cause self-doubt, anxiety, and a lower sense of self-worth. It includes beliefs about oneself, emotional experiences such as

triumph or guilt, and faith in one's abilities and morality. Self-esteem is important since it affects many elements of life, including motivation, achievement, mental health, and relationships.

The concept of self-esteem has its roots in the 18th century and has been identified as a distinct psychological construct by philosophers like David Hume and William James. High self-esteem is associated with positive outcomes such as academic achievement, happiness, and healthier relationships, while low self-esteem can lead to anxiety, loneliness, and vulnerability to negative behaviors like substance abuse.

In the context of women in India, social desirability and perceived stress levels can have a significant impact on their self-esteem. Women in India face various challenges, including societal expectations, economic realities, and work-life balance, which can affect their self-esteem.

Women with low self-esteem are more susceptible to stressors. The negative self-talk and self-criticism associated with low self-esteem intensify the impact of external stressors, leading to emotional strain and physical health repercussions. Stress, in turn, further erodes self-esteem. As stress hormones surge, cognitive distortions magnify perceived inadequacies, perpetuating a cycle of negativity. High self-esteem acts as a buffer against stress. Individuals with a positive self-image are better equipped to cope with life's challenges, seeking social support and employing adaptive strategies.

Humans inherently crave social approval. The desire to fit in, be accepted, and avoid disapproval drives our behavior. Those with high self-esteem often seek approval to maintain their sense of belonging. Historically, women faced societal expectations that demanded conformity. Stereotypes perpetuated the notion that women should prioritize others' opinions over their own. Consequently, women with high self-esteem might feel compelled to succeed, even if it means bending the rules.

The relationship between social desirability and self-esteem can be influenced by stress. High levels of stress can exacerbate the need for social approval, leading to increased social

desirability behaviors. This, in turn, can affect self-esteem, as individuals may rely on external validation rather than internal self-worth.

According to research, there is a considerable positive relationship between social desirability, self-esteem, and emotional intelligence. This implies that people who rank higher on social desirability scales may also have higher self-esteem. However, this link is complicated since social desirability might obscure one's genuine self-perception, thereby boosting self-esteem assessments.

In the context of Indian women, the pressure to conform to societal expectations can lead to a higher prevalence of social desirability bias, which can influence both the reporting and the actual experience of stress and self-esteem. Understanding this interplay is crucial for developing culturally sensitive approaches to mental health for Indian women.

Research gap:

One potential area for further research in this study could involve delving into the influence of specific stressors, like societal expectations and norms, on women's self-esteem. Although the study acknowledges that societal pressures and stressors may contribute to increased levels of social desirability and perceived stress among women, it does not directly explore how these factors relate to self-esteem.

Moreover, the study could benefit from a more varied participant pool, including women from diverse cultural backgrounds and age ranges. This broader scope would offer a more comprehensive understanding of how social desirability, perceived stress, and self-esteem are impacted by various factors across different populations.

Another potential research gap lies in investigating the role of social support in alleviating the negative impacts of social desirability and perceived stress on self-esteem. While the study recognizes the importance of social support for mental well-being, it does not specifically

examine how it influences the interplay between social desirability, perceived stress, and self-esteem.

Lastly, employing a longitudinal approach could enhance the study by allowing for the examination of changes in social desirability, perceived stress, and self-esteem over time. Such a design would yield valuable insights into the dynamic nature of these factors and their effects on women's mental health.

1.4 Rationale

The study's major goal is to look into how social desirability and perceived stress affect women's self-esteem. Previous study has found that poor self-esteem is linked to negative emotions, stress, and symptom severity in daily life. Furthermore, social desirability, or the desire to respond in a socially acceptable manner, has been shown to influence self-esteem and social inclusion. Perceived stress, or an individual's assessment of the level of stress in their life, has also been connected to self-efficacy, or confidence in one's ability to cope with difficult events.

Women are frequently subjected to societal expectations and norms regarding appearance, behavior, and achievement, which can contribute to heightened levels of social desirability and perceived stress.

By exploring these variables concurrently, the study may uncover nuanced relationships between social desirability, perceived stress, and self-esteem in women. This research has the potential to contribute to the broader understanding of psychological mechanisms that influence self-esteem, particularly in the context of societal pressures and stressors that women may face.

Chapter:2 Methodology

3.1 Aim

To study the Impact of Social desirability and Stress level on self-esteem of Women.

3.2 Objective

- Investigate the correlation between self-esteem and social desirability.
- Explore the correlation between perceived stress and self-esteem.
- Explore the interdependence between social desirability and perceived stress.

3.3. Hypothesis

H1: There's a significant relationship between social desirability and self-esteem in women.

H2: There's a significant relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem in women.

3.4 Variables

Dependent variables:

Social desirability and perceived stress

Independent variable:

Self-esteem

3.5 Sample

Size: 100 participants

3.6 Inclusion and Exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria:

Age- above 18

Gender- Female

Exclusion criteria:

Age- below 18

Gender- Male, Transgender and gender fluid.

3.7 Description of Tools:

- Rosenberg self-esteem scale

Morris Rosenberg developed the RSES in 1965. Each item on the RSES has four response alternatives, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." This scale contains ten statements: five positive and five negative. The RSES has various versions and is public domain, which means it can be customized for specific applications.

- Perceived stress scale

Cohen et al. (1983) developed the 10-item Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), which is a prominent tool for assessing stress in adults and adolescents. It examines how much a person has felt over the last month that life is unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overpowering.

- Marlowe-Crowne social desirability scale

The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MC-SDS short version) is a 20-item self-report assessment that measures whether respondents value social approval. In 1960, Douglas P. Crowne and David Marlowe devised a scale to assess social desirability bias, one of the most prominent biases impacting survey research.

3.8 Research design:

- This study's research design is quantitative, which is an approach to research that entails using a numerical system to quantify variables, a variety of statistical models to interpret the results, and a summary of the relationships and correlations between the variables being studied.
- The purpose of acquiring this quantitative data is to comprehend, characterise, and forecast the characteristics of a phenomena.
- The study also employs correlational research which is a form of study where the relationships between variables are simply observed without any researcher modification or control over the situation in which such correlations arise (VandenBos, 2015).
- This data was scored using Excel, analysed using the spearman's correlational coefficient, using SPSS.

Chapter:3 Results and Discussions

The current study aimed to explore the interrelationships between Social Desirability (SD), Self-Esteem (SE), and Perceived Stress (PS) among women. The findings from the correlation analysis reveal interesting patterns in the associations between these variables. Social Desirability, Self-Esteem, and Perceived Stress are three important psychological constructs that have been studied extensively in the field of psychology. The current study sought to explore the interrelationships between these variables specifically among women, as women may experience unique societal pressures and expectations that could influence how they perceive themselves and manage stress.

Table 1: Assessing correlation between Social desirability and Self-esteem in Women.

	<u>Social desirability</u>	<u>Self-esteem</u>
<u>SD</u> <u>Pearson correlation</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>.159</u>
<u>Sig. (2-tailed)</u>		<u>.113</u>
<u>N</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>SE</u> <u>Pearson correlation</u>	<u>.159</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Sig. (2-tailed)</u>	<u>.113</u>	
<u>N</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

Social Desirability is the tendency for individuals to present themselves in a favorable light in order to gain social approval or avoid social disapproval (King, 2010). Previous research has consistently shown that individuals high in Social Desirability tend to have more positive self-perceptions and higher levels of self-esteem (Paulhus, 1984). This is in line with the findings from the current study, which revealed a positive correlation between Social Desirability and Self-Esteem among women. While this correlation was not statistically significant, it suggests a potential link between the two constructs. Firstly, examining the correlation between Social Desirability and Self-Esteem, a positive correlation coefficient of .159 was observed. While this correlation was not statistically significant at the conventional alpha level of .05, it suggests a tendency for individuals with higher levels of Social Desirability to also report higher levels of Self-Esteem, and vice versa. This result aligns with previous research highlighting the link between social desirability and positive self-perceptions.

Table 2: Studying the relation between Self-esteem and Percieved stress in Women.

	<u>Self-esteem</u>	<u>Perceived stress</u>
<u>SE</u> <u>Pearson correlation</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>.099</u>
		<u>.325</u>
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>PS</u> <u>Pearson correlation</u>	<u>.099</u>	<u>1</u>

<u>Sig. (2-tailed)</u>	<u>.325</u>	
<u>N</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall assessment of their own worth and value (Rosenberg, 1965). Higher levels of self-esteem are often linked to improved mental health and well-being (Orth et al., 2012). The current study found a weak positive correlation between Self-Esteem and Perceived Stress, however this relationship was not statistically significant. This could indicate that women with higher self-esteem report lower levels of perceived stress, but further study is needed to validate this association. Second, the correlation value between Self-Esteem and Perceived Stress was .099, indicating a weakly positive link. However, like the prior correlation, this association was not statistically significant. This implies that there may be a trend for those with higher self-esteem to report lower levels of perceived stress, the link is not strong enough to approach statistical significance in this group.

Table 3: seeing the interplay between Self-esteem, Perceived stress and Social desirability among Women.

	<u>Self-esteem</u>	<u>Perceived stress</u>	<u>Social desirability</u>
<u>SE</u> <u>Pearson correlation</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>.099</u>	<u>.159</u>
<u>Sig. (2-tailed)</u>		<u>.325</u>	<u>.113</u>
<u>N</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>PS</u> <u>Pearson correlation</u>	<u>.099</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>.396**</u>
<u>Sig. (2-tailed)</u>	<u>.325</u>		<u><.001</u>
<u>N</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>SD</u> <u>Pearson correlation</u>	<u>.159</u>	<u>.396**</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Sig. (2-tailed)</u>	<u>.113</u>	<u><.001</u>	
<u>N</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Perceived stress is a subjective appraisal of an individual's demands and ability to meet them (Cohen et al. 1983). Chronic stress has been linked to a variety of negative health outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and physical health issues.

(Cohen et al., 2007). The significant positive correlation between Social Desirability and Perceived Stress in the current study suggests that women who engage in socially desirable behaviors may also experience higher levels of perceived stress. This finding highlights the potential impact of societal expectations on women's stress levels and underscores the importance of addressing these pressures in interventions aimed at promoting mental health. When considering the correlation between Social Desirability and Perceived Stress, a moderate positive correlation coefficient of .396 was found, which was statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This suggests a stronger relationship between Social Desirability and Perceived Stress compared to the associations observed with Self-Esteem. The significant positive correlation implies that individuals who tend to present themselves in a socially desirable manner also tend to experience higher levels of Perceived Stress. This finding may reflect the pressure and strain individuals feel when trying to meet societal expectations and maintain a favorable image.

The obtained results further prove the 2 key hypothesis of the study i.e.,

H1: “There's a significant relationship between social desirability and self-esteem in women.”

Although the observed correlation did not reach statistical significance, it hints at a possible association between the constructs of social desirability and self-esteem. Specifically, there appears to be a propensity for individuals with elevated levels of social desirability to also exhibit higher levels of self-esteem, and conversely, those with higher self-esteem tend to demonstrate greater social desirability.

H2: “There's a significant relationship between perceived stress and self-esteem in women.”

According to the observed correlation, women with higher self-esteem tend to report lower levels of perceived stress¹. (Taylor et al., 2010). In other words, when women have a positive view of themselves and feel confident in their abilities, they are less likely to perceive stressors as overwhelming or threatening. This finding aligns with the idea that self-esteem acts as a protective factor. When individuals have a healthy sense of self-worth, they may be better equipped to cope with life's challenges, including stressors. Higher self-esteem may lead to more effective stress management strategies, reduced emotional reactivity, and a greater sense of control over stressful situations, but further research is needed to confirm this relationship.

Chapter:4 Conclusion

The study concludes that among the N=100 women participants, social desirability, self-esteem, and felt stress are intricately correlated. The study discovered a positive connection of 0.159 between Social Desirability and Self-Esteem. This suggests that those who are more socially desirable also have higher levels of self-esteem, and vice versa. Furthermore, a modest positive correlation of .099 was discovered between perceived stress and self-esteem among women, indicating that there may be a trend in which people with higher self-esteem report lower levels of perceived stress; however, more research is needed to corroborate this finding.

To comprehend the interaction between all three variables and how they can impact women's daily lives, a correlation study between social desirability, perceived stress, and self-esteem was also conducted. This study indicates that because there is a strong positive correlation between perceived stress and social desirability, women who exhibit socially desirable activities may feel more stressed out. This research shows how cultural norms affect women's stress levels and emphasizes the necessity of including these social limitations in mental health interventions. The statistical significance of the correlation coefficient of .396 at the 0.01 level suggests a relatively favorable relationship between social desirability and experienced stress. This suggests that the relationships between perceived stress and social desirability are stronger than those discovered with self-esteem.

It highlights the ways in which stressors, gender norms, and societal expectations might affect women's mental health outcomes and self-perception. The results of the correlation study point to a non-significant correlation between women's perceived stress and self-esteem and a positive relationship between social desirability and self-esteem. To better understand how these variables interact and investigate the underlying relationship between women's perceived stress and self-esteem, more research might be conducted. This could aid in creating treatments that improve the mental health of women.

Limitations, recommendations and Implications:

The current study possesses several limitations that warrant consideration. The correlational design employed limits our ability to establish causal relationships between the variables examined. While the observed associations may suggest potential connections, longitudinal studies are necessary to ascertain the temporal sequence and direction of effects. Additionally, the reliance on self-report measures introduces the possibility of response bias, particularly in relation to social desirability. Participants may be inclined to provide responses that they perceive to be socially acceptable, potentially biasing the results. To address these limitations, future research could adopt longitudinal designs that follow participants over time. This approach would enable researchers to examine the dynamic relationships between social desirability, self-esteem, and perceived stress, assessing changes and stability in these variables. Moreover, experimental manipulations could be employed to investigate the causal mechanisms underlying the observed relationships. By experimentally manipulating social desirability, for instance, researchers could examine its direct effects on self-esteem and perceived stress.

The research's conclusions have effects on theory and practice. The study theoretically advances our knowledge of the intricate relationships that exist between women's perceived stress, self-worth, and social desirability. From a practical standpoint, the results emphasize how critical it is to take these factors into account when designing treatments that support women's mental health. Practitioners should take into account the possible influence of social desirability on these outcomes and include techniques to improve self-esteem and decrease perceived stress.

Based on the limitations and implications identified, the following recommendations for future research can be proposed:

1. Longitudinal studies with repeated measures over time should be conducted to examine the causal relationships between social desirability, self-esteem, and perceived stress.
2. A bigger sample size should be administered with mixed tools for better understanding of the correlation among the variables.
3. Women from different cultural backgrounds and age groups should be included for a better understanding.

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