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Self-esteem and its associated demographic factors among undergraduate nursing students at a tertiary institution in Southwestern Uganda: A cross-sectional study.

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Abstract

Introduction
Self-esteem refers to one's positive or negative attitude towards oneself and the evaluation of one's thoughts and feelings overall about oneself. It is a vital element in a person's life as it affects the overall human behaviours and relationships. The level of self-esteem has an impact on the way one accepts responsibilities, their communication skills, and the way one cooperates with others, human response to stressful life events, and how to deal with positive and negative emotions. **Purpose:** To assess levels of self-esteem and demographic factors associated with self-esteem levels among undergraduate nursing students of Mbarara University of Science and Technology.

Methodology
The study used a cross-sectional study design and recruited 139 students who are undergraduate nurses at Mbarara University of Science and Technology. The self-esteem of the participants was measured using the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES), and data were analyzed using SPSS version 23.

Results
59.70% of the participants had moderate levels of self-esteem, 40.3% had low self-esteem, and no one had high self-esteem. Of all the assessed demographic factors, age, sex, year of study, program of study, marital status, sponsorship program, and religion, year of study was the only factor significantly associated with levels of self-esteem.

Conclusion
There are no undergraduate nursing students with high self-esteem at Mbarara University of Science and Technology.

Recommendations
Additional research on self-esteem and associated demographic factors ought to be done using much larger populations so as to have enough data to make adequate statistical analysis, probably a study involving nursing students from different nursing institutions all at once. A qualitative study, as well as to further describe the relation between self-esteem and associated demographic factors, is key in further understanding this concept.

Keywords: *Self-esteem, Nursing Students, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Nursing, Demographics, Attitude, Uganda.*
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Background

Self-esteem as a concept has been defined by many scholars. Rosenberg (1965) defined self-esteem as one's positive or negative attitude towards oneself and the evaluation of one's thoughts and feelings overall about oneself (Park and Park, 2019). It is commonly classified as high self-esteem and low self-esteem. With high self-esteem, referring to that attitude of self-love and acceptance, these people often believe in themselves and their abilities. Low self-esteem, on the other hand, makes someone think of themselves as being below average, and they are usually slow to accept responsibilities and cooperate with others (Bank, 2020).

Self-esteem is an ever-changing concept (Howard, 2017), and this has necessitated the creation of various tools for measurement, such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale,

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Janis-Field Feeling of Inadequacy Scale, Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, and Pope's 5-Scale Test of Self-Esteem for children (Hosogi *et al.*, 2012). The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), developed in the mid-1960s by Morris Rosenberg, is the most widely used tool for assessing self-esteem (Kori, 2020).

Globally, research has shown that self-esteem among nursing students varied depending on the country they came from, with percentages of low, average, and high self-esteem being significantly different among the students (Kupcewicz *et al.*, 2020). Numerous studies have been done to understand nursing students' self-esteem, highlighting the significance of this concept. The majority of these studies have found nursing students to have moderate to low levels of self-esteem, with a few having high self-esteem(Subashini, 2022; Almansour, 2023; Madu *et al.*, 2023). For instance, a study in a nursing school in Bangalore College of Nursing, India showed 68.6% of the students had moderate self-esteem, 31.4% had low self-esteem and no one registered high self-esteem (Ingale, More and Shinde, 2022); according to the study findings, the self-esteem of the students was correlated to the parents' education status and occupation were students whose parents were unemployed and of low income status recorded the least levels of esteem. In a similar study conducted in Kamthandu University, India, it showed that 78% of the students had low self-esteem and the remaining percentage (22%) had moderate self-esteem (Acharya Pandey and Chalise, 2017); 74% of the students who participated in this very study recorded high stress levels, drawing a relationship between academic stress and self-esteem i.e. academic stress and self-esteem are directly proportional (Acharya Pandey and Chalise, 2017). The existing body of literature has shown a relationship between self-esteem and demographic factors. Regarding gender and self-esteem, several studies have shown that male students score a higher level of self-esteem as compared to females (Mohamed and Ado, 2019; Subashini, 2022; Nagórska *et al.*, 2023), while others report no significant statistical differences between self-esteem levels between males and females (Almansour, 2023). A meta-analytical study on the development of self-esteem from the age of 4 to 94 years concluded that self-esteem of an individual changes systematically following age; it increases in early and middle childhood, remains constant in adolescence and increases in adulthood; then starts to drop in late adulthood (Orth, Erol and Luciano, 2018). Regarding year of study, some studies concluded that self-esteem is higher in higher academic years (Subashini, 2022) while others revealed that self-esteem levels drop as academic years increase (Zamanzadeh *et al.*, 2016; Zhang, Gao, and Liu, 2022).

In Africa, self-esteem as a concept is still understudied (Madu *et al.*, 2023) though some studies have drawn correlations between self-esteem and students mental health especially suicidal behaviours, with emphasis on provision of supportive resources through academic guidance and psychological counselling as a way of improving self-esteem outcomes among students (Yosr, 2021).

Self-esteem among nursing students has been recorded to be low and continuously declining (Brown and Crookes, 2016; Ingale, More and Shinde, 2022), perhaps more rapidly in low and middle-income countries such as Uganda. Of course, the causes of low self-esteem vary across different regions and settings, with some studies attributing it to academic stress, as nursing is considered a very difficult program. Self-esteem plays a key role in affecting proficiency for a specific field of study; especially for nursing students, enough self- esteem makes them proud of their nursing role, and they enjoy the nursing course and all that it means to be a nurse (Megahed and Mohammad, 2014; Zamanzadeh *et al.*, 2016). Being an important aspect in a nursing student's life, nursing education has been tailored to train these students in relevant faculties which facilitate the development of required skills and self-esteem(Zamanzadeh *et al.*, 2016). Despite all the actions being taken to boost self-esteem among these students, assessing their levels of self-esteem regularly is key in identifying students who are at higher risk of experiencing academic difficulties (Almansour, 2023). Besides that, studies in a specific study setting to gain a better perspective on self-esteem are very important (Almansour, 2023). Therefore, this study seeks to assess the levels of self-esteem among nursing students of Mbarara University of Science and Technology.

Methods

Study design

The study used a cross-sectional design.

Study setting

The Study was done in a tertiary public university, Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST), which was established in October 1989 as the second public university in Uganda after Makerere University (MUK) and is located along the Mbarara-Kabale highway in Mbarara town, approximately 266 km southwest of Kampala. This study focused on the Bachelor of Science

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in Nursing program within the Department of Nursing under the Faculty of Medicine.

Study population

The researcher used a census method of sampling, including all 163 undergraduate nursing students from the Department of Nursing at MUST. Among these were students on the Direct Entry scheme (BNS), that is, those who completed Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE), and another group (BNC) from the Completion scheme who joined with a Diploma in a nursing speciality. The BNS students totaled 93, while the BNC was 70 in total. All undergraduate nursing students interested in participating in the study were to be included, regardless of academic year, and those excluded from the study were postgraduate nursing students and the principal researcher himself to avoid research bias.

Data collection procedure

After acquiring a letter of introduction from the Department of Nursing at Mbarara University of Science and Technology, the researcher contacted all class leaders of the various classes via phone calls and WhatsApp, and set up appointments with the students through these leaders. All appointments were set for daytime in appropriate lecture rooms and halls to avoid any inconveniences to the study participants and the researcher. On the already selected date, the researcher met up with a specific class, one at a time, since it was easier to get a hold of a single class group; the researcher explained the reason for the meeting and allowed the students to give their personal informed written consent using the consent forms issued out.

After obtaining consent, the researcher instructed the participants to proceed to the questions on the questionnaire and answer them.

Since the questionnaires were self-administered in nature, the researcher was only available to guide anyone with questions, but did not have any influence on the answers selected.

The researcher counted the issued-out questionnaires and the ones he had collected so as to ensure all of them were answered and returned for maximum data collection.

This data collection was carried out in the month of March, 2024.

Data collection tools

A self-administered questionnaire comprising two sections, written in English because the study respondents were all in a tertiary institution, was used for data collection. Section A consisted of questions on demographic characteristics such as age, gender, level of education and program of study of the respondents while section B had 10 questions derived from the Rosenberg Self-esteem scale (RSES) developed by Rosenberg, M. in 1965, questions which are answered on a four- point likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The scale ranges from 0-30, with scores between 0 and 14 representing low self-esteem, 15 – 25 representing moderate self-esteem, and 26 to 30 representing high self-esteem. This RSES is a very widely used scale in the determination of both global self-esteem in nursing institutions and other disciplines (Dancot *et al.*, 2021; Oducado, 2021).

Data analysis

After data collection, the data were entered into Microsoft Excel 2010, where it was cleaned and then later imported into IBM SPSS version 23 for statistical and analytical calculations. Regarding the Likert RSES, the ten questions were labelled and rated from 0 to 3, with 0 representing the lowest score and 3 representing the highest score for questions 1,2,4,6, and 7. Questions 3,5,8,9, and 10 were reverse scored. The total was then calculated, categorized according to the already set ranges, thus between 0 and 14 representing low self-esteem, 15 – 25 representing moderate self-esteem, and 26 to 30 representing high self-esteem. Results were presented in percentages. Bivariate analysis to show correlations between demographic data and level of self-esteem was done as well.

Ethical consideration

The study protocol underwent review from the department of nursing and the Faculty Research Committee (FRC), and study approval was granted on the 1st.03. 2024. Informed Consent was a must from all eligible participants willing to participate in the study, and they had to witness this by signing an Informed Consent form.

Results

Demographic data collected from the study

A total of 139 study participants were recruited into the study, and below is a table showing demographic characteristics of the study population.

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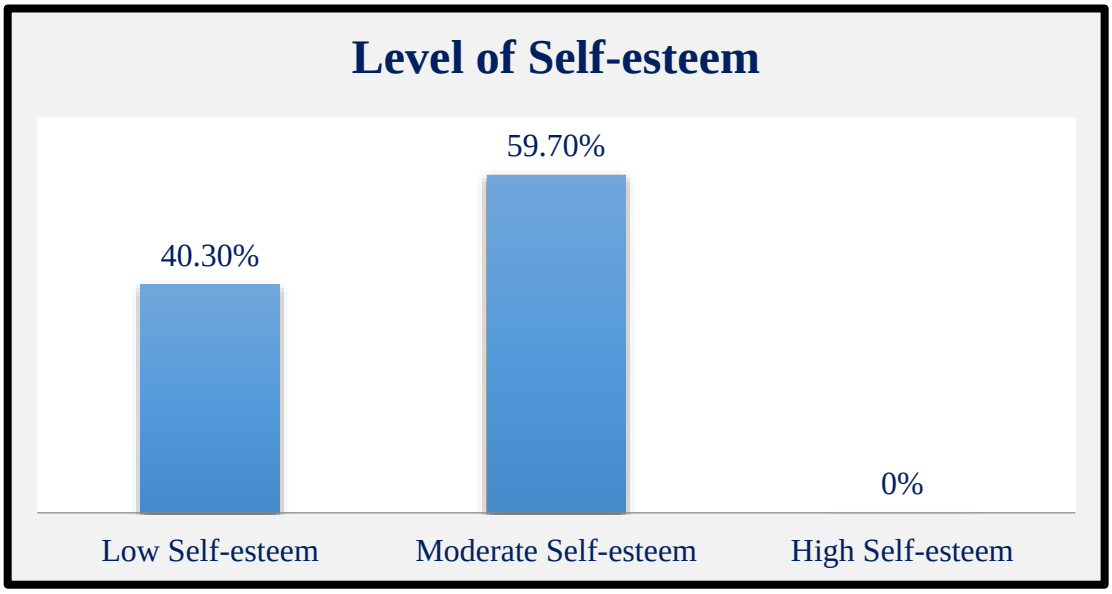
Table 1: A summary of all demographic factors of the study participants

Variable	Category	Frequency n (%)
Gender	Male	76 (54.7)
	Female	63 (45.3)
Year Of Study	Year One	40 (28.8)
	Year Two	29 (20.9)
	Year Three	42 (30.2)
	Year Four	28 (20.1)
Programme Of Study	BNS	85 (61.2)
	BNC	54 (38.8)
Religious Affiliation	Anglican	50 (36.0)
	Catholic	51 (36.7)
	Islam	10 (7.2)
	Pentecostal	25 (18.0)
	Seventh Day Adventist	3 (2.2)
Marital Status	Married	44 (31.7)
	Single	95 (68.3)
	Widowed	0 (0)
	Divorced	0 (0)
Sponsorship Program	Government Sponsored	20 (14.4)
	Self-Sponsored	119 (85.6)

Level of self-esteem among undergraduate nursing students

Figure 1: A bar graph showing the level of self-esteem among undergraduate nursing students



Of 139 participants who were enrolled in the study, 56 of them had low self-esteem, which is a percentage of 40.3%

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and 83 had moderate self-esteem, making a percentage of 59.7%. Out of all the study participants, no one recorded a high self-esteem score as indicated in the graph.

Table 2: A table showing levels of self-esteem and p-values recorded under each demographic factor

Variable	Category	Level of self-esteem n (%)		P value
		Low	Moderate	
Gender	Male	32 (42.1)	44 (57.9)	0.686
	Female	24 (38.1)	39 (61.9)	
Year Of Study	Year One	14 (35.0)	26 (65.0)	0.038
	Year Two	14 (48.3)	15 (51.7)	
	Year Three	22 (52.4)	20 (47.6)	
	Year Four	6 (21.4)	22 (78.6)	
Program Of Study	BNS	33 (38.8)	52 (61.2)	0.595
	BNC	23 (42.6)	31 (57.4)	
Religious Affiliation	Anglican	21 (42.0)	29 (58.0)	0.690
	Catholic	21 (41.2)	30 (58.8)	
	Islam	4 (40.0)	6 (60.0)	
	Pentecostal	9 (36.0)	16 (64.0)	
	Seventh Day Adventist	1 (33.3)	2 (66.7)	
Marital Status	Married	19 (43.2)	25 (56.8)	0.562
	Single	37 (38.9)	58 (61.1)	
Sponsorship Program	Government Sponsored	10 (50.0)	10 (50.0)	0.342
	Self-Sponsored	46 (38.7)	73 (61.3)	

Year of study is the only demographic factor that is significantly associated with levels of self-esteem, with a p-value of *0.038.*

Discussion

Level of self-esteem

Results from *Figure 1* indicate that a majority of the students have moderate self-esteem; the rest have low self-esteem, and none of the students has high self-esteem. It turns out none of the undergraduate nursing students at MUST highly believe in themselves or their abilities, seeing that none of them has a particularly high self-esteem. But rather majority of them have average belief in themselves, with a smaller majority believing themselves to be below average, with low levels of self-esteem. These results correlate with a similar study that was conducted in three nursing schools in Nigeria, where 27.0% of the students had low self-esteem, 69.0% moderate, and only 4.0% with high self-esteem (Madu *et al.*, 2023). The results could be similar, probably because of the study settings; both Uganda and Nigeria are low- and middle-income countries in the African continent, hence are bound to have similar political, economic, and social factors (Lumanga and Timonip, 2024).

According to the study findings, the majority of the students have moderate self-esteem. This means that most of them strike a balance between low and high self-esteem, which perhaps is not that disadvantageous because with such levels of esteem, productivity might still be possible. These results are similar to a number of other studies, which recorded an approximate average of 70% of the students having average levels of self-esteem (Ibrahim, 2015; Almansour, 2023; Subashini, 2022; Madu *et al.*, 2023). This level of self-esteem is perhaps good for students, for it enables them to keep growing and have more chances for improvement (Almansour, 2023).

Results of this study show that none of the students has high self-esteem, which contradicts several other studies conducted in other countries and found that the majority of the students had high self-esteem (Almansour, 2023). The reason we have no one with high self-esteem is perhaps because students might doubt their ability to perform well in nursing school, the nursing program is very stressful, and nurses usually consider themselves

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inferior to their counterparts, the doctors (Valizadeh *et al.*, 2016; Zamanzadeh *et al.*, 2016; Rodríguez-Pérez *et al.*, 2022)

Self-esteem among the nursing students enrolled for this study varies, probably because of factors such as age, gender, level of study, program of study, and other demographic factors.

Demographic factors associated with the level of self-esteem

Results of the study show that only the year of study had a significant relationship with levels of self-esteem, with students in year four having average higher self-esteem levels as compared to students in other academic years. This implies that self-esteem levels experience an upward trend as a student advances in academic years, right from year one to year four. This contradicts the findings of similar studies, which concluded that the level of esteem reduces as students advance in academic years (Zamanzadeh *et al.*, 2016; Zhang, Gao, and Liu, 2022). This may be attributed to the fact that as students advance in years of study, they are exposed to what it means to be a nurse, hence gain better experience and in doing so boost their overall self-esteem (Beghetto and Guay, 2020).

According to the study findings, all other demographic factors had no significant relationship with levels of self-esteem, perhaps due to the small sample size recruited. Despite that, findings of the study revealed that students who were self-sponsored had a higher level of self-esteem as compared to those on government sponsorship, which aligns with study findings from a similar study done in China (Yu *et al.*, 2022). This is probably because having money creates a form of satisfaction, a feeling of accomplishment, and improves social status, which builds personal self-esteem (Riggio and Lybi, 2023).

Generally, the BNS program scored higher levels of self-esteem as compared to the BNC program; probably because the completion students have more stressors such as work and family obligations, which stress might lower self-esteem (Amanya, Nakitende, and Ngabirano, 2018).

Generalizability of results

Data was only collected from undergraduate nursing students from MUST, which offers a small study population and context-specific results; therefore, it would be difficult to generalise these study findings to all nursing students globally. Though it would be generalised for nursing students within nursing institutions around Uganda, since the numbers admitted are similar, and study conditions do not vary that much.

Conclusion

Among all the undergraduate nursing students at MUST, no one has high self-esteem, and this is a major concern because it is known that having no high self-esteem can affect the general productivity of students and eventually affect nursing as a profession.

Limitations of the study

The only significant limitation to this study was the small study population to work with since undergraduate nursing students admitted to MUST are few.

Recommendations

- Based on these study findings, the department of nursing, the faculty of medicine, and the university governing body:
- Should engage the nursing students' bodies in self-esteem building programs such as mentorship, teamwork and interdisciplinary training, and leadership retreats.
- Create platforms for the students to freely express and report about themselves confidentially so that we can quickly identify those in need of assistance, whether emotional, financial, or even spiritual, and respond immediately.
- Create opportunities for some students to practice their public speech, leadership, and teamwork skills so that they can build on their overall self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Findings of this study should be critically evaluated and considered as one of the determining factors during the ongoing curriculum revision process.

Further Research Recommendations

- Further research on students' self-esteem ought to be done involving a much bigger study population to have enough data to make adequate statistical analysis, probably a research study involving nursing students from different nursing institutions all at once.
- There is a need to have a deeper analysis of factors associated with self-esteem levels,

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probably done using a qualitative approach, to come to much better and vivid conclusions.

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List of abbreviations

BNC: Bachelor of Science in Nursing Completion
BNS: Bachelor of Science in Nursing
FRC: Faculty Research Committee
HoD: Head of Department
MUK: Makerere University
MUST: Mbarara University of Science and Technology
RSES: Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale
SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UACE: Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education

Source of funding

All financial necessities needed for this study were covered by the researcher.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest in this work.

Author contribution

Andrew Atuhaire: Principal researcher, conceived and designed the study proposal, performed data collection, analysis, and presented the study results. Wrote the paper and followed up on the corrections from the peer reviewers.
Doris Babirye Kasasa: Helped in drafting the study idea, data collection, and reviewed the manuscript.
Catherine Atuhaire: Reviewed and provided critical feedback on the study proposal and dissertation.
Vallence Niyonzima: Reviewed the study protocol and final dissertation, provided important feedback and comments.
Rachel Luwaga: Provided overall planning and guidance throughout the entire study as the supervisor. Was the chief reviewer of study proposal, dissertation, and manuscript.

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Data availability

The data collected and analysed are available from the corresponding author, provided necessary requisitions are made.

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