

## Relationship between fear of success and self-esteem: A study on middle management

Harprit Kaur and Navjit Kaur

Department of Psychology, Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab

A potential leadership divests organizations and society because these individuals fail to realize their full potential. Fear of success can be defined as persons who fail to realize their full potential and withdraw from success, because of the negative consequences that prevent the person from dreaming and achieving his goals. Self-esteem is a factor contributing to personal satisfaction and effective functioning, a realization that they are good and valuable individuals. The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between the fear of success and self-esteem among Multinational Company managers. It also aimed to study the gender differences between the fear of success and self-esteem. This study was based on an empirical investigation conducted among 40 male and 40 female professional managers from various middle management of various organizations. The instruments used for this research were Fear of Success (Zuckerman & Allison, 1976) and State Self-Esteem scale (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). Correlation and t-test were used for analyzing the results. Obtained results showed there was a significant correlation between self-esteem and fear of success. Components of self-esteem show significant correlation with fear of success. Male managers were significantly higher than female managers on self-esteem, while female managers were significantly higher than their male counterparts on fear of success. Implications for practice and research are discussed in the present study.

Keywords: managers, fear of success and self-esteem

Various organizations face the problem of fear of success and self-esteem in their middle management (Amabile et al., 2004). "Fear of success" is that kind of fear in which happiness, satisfaction and pleasure will not be enjoyed by the individual even after reaching the goal as he does not accomplish up to his abilities. In other words, such type of persons thinks that others who are better or perform well will replace them if they do not maintain their performance record.

Fear of success is the association of an expectation of negative consequences with achievement. Fear of Success (FOSS) was first introduced by Horner in 1972. Horner (1972) believed that highly competent females, when challenged with standard achievement tasks or when they are on the beginning of culturally desirable achievements, they avoid success because they face both anxiety and decrement in their performance. According to her, women have a motive to avoid success because success is perceived as being associated with negative social consequences like social rejection, social disapproval or feeling of being unfeminine. This could result into a conflict where women tend to adjust their behaviors into those of traditional gender role stereotypes.

Fleming (1975) defined fear of success as a deep association with apprehensions for negative consequences in a person, which becomes hurdles in his way; or losing self-confidence in relation to another perceived more powerful group which may punish the individual for being assertive.

According to Richardson (2004), the individual fears success because he/she thinks that if he/she becomes successful, others will behave differently, in fact negatively. Achievement and success are shunned because they are expected to rouse others anger and jealousy which will lead to losing others support and love. Even the

thought of this exaggerates the anxiety in the person and for this reason, they feel that he /she should avoid any action that shows a sign of success and ambition and this vicious circle continues.

Fear of success is that mental pattern in which the individual thinks of different modes of change after getting success so that they may be able to cope with the feared negative social consequences (Rao, 2004). It was observed by Bagget (2000) that persons want success but they still aloof themselves by slacking and refraining from actions for the same because they feel undeserving of the prospective success. This fear may be due to the lack of confidence to attain the goal (Brooks, 2005). Generally, fear of success is observed in women who have high desire for success. However, women with lesser capabilities may exhibit even lesser desire for success and thus make fewer attempts for success (Farahani, 1999).

Generally, fear of success very frequently is accompanied by lack of confidence and self-respect, and individuals who carry such type of characteristics often turn out to be what others want them to be. Hence, these individuals modify their behavior based on the needs and desires of others, in order to get their affirmation. Therefore, fear is an essential part of their lives and the feelings of helplessness make them dependent on others (Motaghi et al., 2004).

### *Self-esteem*

Self-esteem is an integral part of success. Low self-esteem can lead to depression or feelings of defeat. Self esteem can be defined as an individual's overall positive evaluation of himself to the extent in which he believes that he is a valuable person (Gecas, 1982; Rosenberg, 1990; Rosenberg et al., 1995). It involves a complex set of emotions, attitudes, and expectations based on the individual's changing skills while interacting with their surroundings and influencing their world (Apter, 1997).

In other words, self-esteem is the evaluative aspect of self-concept which describes a person's overall sense of personal value

whether he is worthy or unworthy (Baumeister et al., 1998). It is a judgment of individuality as well as an attitude towards the selfhood. Everyday experiences always make the thoughts and feelings of the person fluctuate, and the level of the self-esteem is crucial, as its extremes may damage the self of the person. Self-esteem is a fundamental concept that starts developing at an early age and sustains throughout an individual's life. If a child grows up in progressive environment, he is likely to develop a healthy self-esteem whereas a hostile environment has a probability of precipitating poor self-esteem.

According to McFarland (1989), self-esteem is a choice. An individual was born into this world a worthy and important human being and deserved to feel good about himself everyday of his life. Self esteem comes from within him and depends on the inner environment he has created. His relationship with himself determines the quality of his self-esteem.

According to the Ab al ghasemi et al. (2010), self-esteem can be defined as the rate of validity, approval, acceptance and worthiness that a person feels about him. It can also be defined as the extension of values of a person's self-imagination in which the information about all his attributes and features comes out as his strongly held beliefs in them (Tamanai far et al., 2010).

Self-esteem has the capability of self-acceptance. How an individual learns, how he works, how he acts, and how he plays is all determined by his level of self-esteem. Four factors are important for an individual to develop and maintain a high level of self-esteem.

- Positive Role Models to provide meaningful goals, values, ideals, and standards.
- Personal Strength that gives the person the ability to influence life's circumstances.
- Uniqueness and Individuality that provide a special personal sense of individual worth.
- Sense of Connectivity and Belonging that foster satisfaction from associations that are significant.

According to Harvey (1981), persons with poor self-esteem have pessimistic outlook in life and also they view things negatively. They continuously strive to attain success so that they can feel worthy and not worthless among others. Yet poor self esteem becomes a monumental hindrance towards achieving the aspired goals. On the other hand, healthy self-esteem makes an individual more engaged in other activities. A person with high self-esteem knows his capabilities and limitations and can actively work towards achieving them. For this reason he accepts himself as a satisfied person in life (Topping & Kimmel, 1985). In contrast, person with poor self-esteem are more prone to loneliness, isolation and with relationship troubles which makes them helpless and sometimes it is seen that they fall into self-harming behaviors' like drug abuse (Harvey, 1981).

The main characteristic of fear of success is the level of self-esteem which comprises of self-evaluation and self-doubt. It was expected that individuals with Fear of Success have more negative self-esteem than the person with low self-esteem (Canavan-Gumpert et al., 1978).

Recent research literature reviews suggest that self-esteem was not the answer of individual's success. As global self-esteem depends upon performance, social approval, and appearance of the individual so that his confidence level can be evaluated. This means that such skills were important for any individual's success and it was found that sometimes individual feel neglected in order to maintain his high

self-esteem. This may be occurred due to instability of self-esteem as it fluctuates with the success and failure of the individual (Kernis, 2005).

Many research studies also suggest that men are less emotional than women (Korman, 2004). Women have often been expected and labeled as being more emotional than men (Bhardwaj & Agrawal, 2013). Gender difference are expected to play an important role in the research as it encompasses self-esteem/ self-image with emotions related to success. In general, some research studies suggest that men show more pride where as women were indicated to show more humiliation, guilt and shame (Wiseman, 2004) but a study given by Else-Quest stated that women show more humiliation, guilt and shame than men but both men and women show the equal amount of pride (Else-Quest et al., 2012).

### *Objectives of the study*

- To study the relationship between fear of success and self-esteem among managers.
- To examine the gender differences in fear of success and self-esteem in managers.

### *Hypotheses of the study*

*Based on the literature reviewed the following hypotheses were proposed:*

- It was expected that there would be a significant correlation between fear of success and self-esteem.
- It was expected that there would be a significant difference between the fear of success and self-esteem in male and female managers.

## Method

### *Participants*

The sample for the present empirical investigation comprised of 80 professional managers (40 males & 40 females) taken from the population of 154 working in different MNCs for at least one year in the company. Out of 154 participants screened, 74 participants were dropped from the study due to incomplete responses, ambiguities in information provided by them. Individuals with any major physical problem were also excluded from the study. All the participants were in the age group of 28-38 years.

### *Instruments*

The chosen sample was examined using the following standardized measures:

*Fear of Success (FOSS; Zuckerman & Allison, 1976):* This is a 27 item scale which measures the specific motive to avoid success. FOSS is scored on seven-point likert scale ranging from 1 (disagree) to 7 (agree). Out of the 27 questions, an agreement with 16 of the statements indicates high fear of success, and an agreement with rest of 11 statements indicates low fear of success. Some of the statements are written in a reverse scoring manner. A subject's score on the FOSS ranges from 27 to 189 with a midpoint of 108. The alpha -coefficients for the fear of success items was reported at 0.79. The measure has internal reliability of 0.69 for men and 0.73 for women (Zuckerman & Allison, 1976).

*State Self-Esteem Scale (SSES; Heatherton & Polivy, 1991):* This is a 20-item scale which measures a participant's self-esteem. It assesses three components of self-esteem, viz., performance

self-esteem, social self-esteem, and appearance self-esteem. Each component of SSES is scored on five-point likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely). Some of the statements in the sub-scales are reversed scored. Scale scores are sums of item ratings. Thus, the overall scores of self-esteem will range from 20 to 100. Coefficient Alpha for this scale is .92 equal for both males and females (Crocker, Cornwell, & Major, 1993).

### Statistical analysis

The analyses of data obtained involved the computation of correlation analysis, and t-test analysis as was appropriate for testing the proposed hypothesis.

## Results

The present study made an effort to study the relationship between self esteem and fear of success in managers. The results obtained were analyzed and the results obtained are presented in tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 shows the correlation between components of self-esteem and fear of success in males and females. There is a significant correlation between self-esteem and fear of success. Components of self-esteem i.e. performance self-esteem and social self-esteem show significant correlation with fear of success at 0.01 level of significance, but the correlation failed to exhibit significant level of relation on 'appearance self-esteem' component of self-esteem.

Table 1: Correlation between components of self-esteem and fear of success

	SSE	PSE	SSE	ASE
FOSS	-0.28*	-0.40**	-0.40**	0.22

SSE: State Self-Esteem, PSE: Performance Self-esteem, SSE: Social Self-Esteem, ASE: Appearance Self-Esteem, FOSS: Fear of Success. \*0.05 level, \*\*0.01 level of significance

Table 2 shows the t-test results of gender differences on self-esteem. The results show significant differences between males and females on the dimensions of self-esteem with males reporting higher self esteem than their female counterparts. However, the results show no significant difference between males and females on total self-esteem.

Table 2: t-test of self-esteem between males and females

	PSE	SSE	ASE	Self-esteem
Females n (35)				
Mean	27.40	26.25	25.22	78.92
SD	02.82	02.81	02.35	05.65
Males n (35)				
Mean	29.47	29.15	22.82	81.45
SD	03.37	02.89	04.23	07.79
t-test	-02.98**	-04.54**	03.13**	-01.65

SSE: State Self-Esteem, PSE: Performance Self-esteem, SSE: Social Self-Esteem, ASE: Appearance Self-Esteem, FOSS: Fear of Success. \*0.05 level, \*\*0.01 level of significance.

Table 3 depicts the t-test results of fear of success between males and females. The results show that there are significant differences between males and females as a whole (0.0level of significance) on fear of success, and the females were higher on fear of success.

Table 3: t-test of fear of success between males and females

Variable	Female mean	SD	Male mean	SD	t-value
FOSS	113.15	19.13	78.92	5.65	10.85**

FOSS: Fear of Success. \*\*0.01 level of significance

## Discussion

The relationship between fear of success and self-esteem has been studied in the current study. Some self-esteem theorists suggest that persons who feel better about themselves perform better. Literature cites a need for systematic research on fear of success and self-esteem tendencies. According to Ivers and Downes (2012), people with fear of success have the tendency to inhibit the opportunity to succeed in their professional lives. Some empirical studies also suggest that the relationship between self-esteem and work performance note a high changeability in the nature of the relationship and its reported size (Brockner, 1983; Tharenou, 1979). The present research was aimed to fulfill this need by examining the relationship between self-esteem and its components with fear of success in managers.

The results of the present study showed that there was a significant correlation between self-esteem and fear of success. From the above results it was found that performance self-esteem and social self-esteem were positively correlated with the fear of success but appearance self-esteem showed no statistically significant correlation between self-esteem and fear of success.

A study conducted by Judge and Bono (2001) surveyed the results of 40 research studies which includes more than 5,000 participants and found that most of the studies showed positive relationship between self-esteem and fear of success. In these studies, the relationship was measured based on the organization self-esteem or performance based self-esteem. In other research studies researchers found that persons with higher self-esteem were more resilient, more productive and more satisfied in their job settings. It is a skill that an individual want i.e. a personal attribute which helps the organizations to perform more productively (Westwood, 2004). The current study has confirmed the above findings.

According to Messina (2005), fear of success is that kind of fear in which the person tries to achieve maximum results from his capabilities or efforts. But the person feels that he will never be satisfied with himself even after achieving his goals and also he does not believe that he can carry out his daily activities properly.

In one of the study, it was found that as the person succeeds in his life he fears that this success will cause him to lose the confidence or attention of others and care. Therefore, this kind of fear will avoid him from revealing his tendencies, emotions and demands because he thinks that others inattention and indifference will disappoint him. As a result, the person becomes more doubtful about his values which could result lose in self-confidence (Messina, 2005).

Ivers and Downes (2012) stated in one of their research work that persons who achieve success may face direct consequences of hostility and isolation. This results in hesitation for striving for success and fear of success which cause disturbed performance by the person. Individuals with attainment orientation could experience fear of success and self-defeating tendencies to protect from uncertainty goal achievements. These tendencies could impact opportunity to succeed.

Above findings has confirmed that person need social acceptance of other persons to boost or to maintain his self-esteem. It also proved our hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between self-esteem and fear of success.

Various studies suggest that reason for the negative correlation between the fear of success and dimension of the self-esteem could be the persons with fear of success prevent themselves from the opportunity to achieve success (Ivers & Downes, 2012). The literature of current study emphasized the same by showing that the persons with fear of success involve in self-defeating behavior because of their uncertainty of the goal achievement. And this may reflect the person's low level of self-esteem. It was explained by Steger et al. (2011) that the individuals who were less focused in their life, were less satisfied and also having low self-acceptance in their life. The current study has confirmed that appearance self-esteem showed no significant relationship with fear of success and confirmed above findings.

Since fear of success and self-esteem are negatively correlated, success seems to be more stressful. Another social aspect which is seen commonly in managers is the zero tolerance for their mistakes which affect their self-esteem and fear of success (Mruk, 1995). For this reason, high self-esteem is associated with a number of positive outcomes which is beneficial both for the individual and the society (Baumeister, 1993; Smelser, 1989).

According to the second hypothesis there was a significant relationship between males and females self-esteem. From above results it was found that scores on fear of success had a significant difference between males and females. Females were more prone to fear of success than male managers. Moghadamipour (2000) noted that every person has the knowledge what is fear of success and that prevents male and females from being successful in their job. Hence, total score between males and females has shown no difference between males and females managers but performance self-esteem, social, and appearance self-esteem have shown significant difference between the males and females managers.

Likewise, several studies reported that higher self-esteem for men in young adulthood (Robins et al., 2002; Twenge & Campbell, 2001) although in some studies the gender difference were negligible/small (Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001) or showed no significance (Galambos et al., 2006).

In addition to gender differences some research studies state that in the success of the partner it was seen that men's self-esteem hurt more than women's self-esteem because men tend to value more competence traits than women do (Guimond, Chatard, Martinot, Crisp, & Redersdorff, 2006; Helgeson, 1994). From the above studies has confirmed the current findings.

Rahmani and Nosrat Abadi (2000) believed that if an individual thinks that whatever he has done is worthless, he shows no interest in working hard and becomes dissatisfied in his life. Crocker, Brook, Niiya, and Villacorta (2006) also believed that fear of success may be the result of dissatisfaction, because here the person is not confident about his abilities and grows slowly and slowly. Also this kind of fear leads to a person feeling unpleasant while doing his job or may be other factors which will disturb him. But when an individual take his responsibilities or actions for his doings it can help him to overcome from his fear of success (Richardson, 2004). The current study hence makes the above observations important for any counseling inputs for managers to enhance their personal well-being as well as performance.

Some previous researches suggest that gender differences in males have shown higher self-esteem than their female counterparts (McMullin & Cairney, 2004; Moksnes, Moljord, Espnes, & Byrne, 2010; Robins et al., 2002; Roeser & Eccles, 1998; Twenge & Campbell, 2001; Young & Mroczek, 2003). However, other studies revealed that the gender differences came to be minimal (Quatman, Sampson, Robinson, & Watson, 2001; Orth et al., 2010) or showed no significant difference between males and females self-esteem (Donnellan et al., 2007; Galambos et al., 2006).

In empirical investigation, researchers show that role vagueness may reduce self-confidence and job satisfaction of staff managers (Shermerhorn, Hant, & Azborn, 1999). This lack of self-confidence plays a most important intensifier factor in fear of success. But based on the results of this research these two variables are independent, maybe because of their high level of self-esteem which will decrease or maintain their level of fear of success. The current study has confirmed the above findings.

Researchers also have found that men tend to exaggerate their competence traits, whereas women tend to exaggerate communal traits (Paulhus & John, 1998). So, it can be one of the contributors that low self-esteem will lead to high fear of success.

Results also reveal that there is no significant difference between males and females managers of self-esteem. But there result also show that there is a significant difference between males and females manager in fear of success. Crocker et al. (2006) believe that one of the reasons of fear of success is the confliction of values with its actions. But it is clear that as these two variables i.e. fear of success and self-esteem are independent that is why they are significantly correlated to each other.

Thus, the research paper concludes with some suggestions which can be helpful to the individual. First thing which is very important for any organization are its human resources. So, it is very important to check the level of fear of success of its employees from time to time. Second, there should be a keen focus on improvement which allows the individual to compare themselves against themselves so that they need not to boost themselves at the expense of others (Emler, 2001). As, the individual performs better, self-esteem is encouraged to rise; this will reinforce happiness of the individual and the betterment of the society.

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