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**Effects of Self Esteem, Emotional Health and Social  
Competence on Romantic Relationship of Adolescents in  
Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

*This study examined the effects of self esteem, emotional health, and social competence on romantic relationship of adolescents in Nigeria. Two hundred and eighty-five adolescents who are undergraduate students of Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti Nigeria, with a mean age of 20.52 years, were randomly selected for the study. The research participants completed a questionnaire comprising of the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale, the General Health Questionnaire, the Relationships Scale Questionnaire and the Social Interaction Anxiety Questionnaire. Using a 2 by 2 by 2 Analysis of Variance,*

four hypotheses were tested and results showed that social competence; and emotional health had significant main effects on romantic relationship of adolescents in Nigeria [ $F(1,240) = 9.457; p < .05$ ] and [ $F(1,240) = 1.238; p < .05$ ] respectively. However, self esteem had no significant main effect on romantic relationship of adolescents in Nigeria [ $F(1,240) = 0.414; p > .05$ ]. Furthermore, it was found out that there was a significant interaction effect of social competence and emotional health on romantic relationship of adolescents in Nigeria [ $F(1,240) = 2.086; p < .05$ ]. There was also a significant interaction effect of self esteem and social competence on romantic relationship of adolescents [ $F(1,240) = 2.150; p < .05$ ]. However, there was no significant interaction effect of self esteem and emotional health on romantic relationship of adolescents in Nigeria, and no significant interaction effect of self esteem, emotional health, and social competence on romantic relationship of adolescents in Nigeria was found. The implications of the finding were discussed in light of available literature and it was suggested, among others, that parents, especially, should make efforts to ensure that the much needed affection and attention that is essential for their children's social and psychological developments and well being are given to them. It is evident that negative self image, deficits in social competence or interpersonal relationship skills and psychological well being often results from a lack of proper parental care for their children and wards.

**Key words:** self esteem, social competence, emotional health, romantic relationships, adolescents, Nigeria

### Introduction

Relationships, in general, refer to the connection or binding of people, concepts, countries, organizations, etc such that either or both parties involved are affected by the outcome of the relationship (Wikipedia, 1990).

Relationships could be romantic or intimate, or they may be mere acquaintanceship. Berscheid, Dion, Walstert And Walstert (1971) defined romantic relationship as close relationship between two people involving either or all of emotional attachment, fulfillment of psychological needs, and interdependence.

During the adolescent years, according to Shaffer (2005), a separation individuation takes place in which adolescents gradually abandon idealized representations of their parents and become increasingly involved in their relationships with peers, especially those which are romantic in nature. As

they grow older, adolescents experience an increasing amount of interdependence and closeness in their relationships (Furman, 2002), which usually become the most important source of support in late adolescence (Furman & Shaffer, 2003). Romantic relationships provide the platform for adolescents to refine their sense of identity and develop interpersonal skills, and also provide emotional support. Just like relationships with family and friends, romantic relationships can facilitate the process of adolescents' understanding of who they are, and what they value (Barber & Eccles, 2003).

Branden, Penkie, Schmitt & VanAkeen (2008) defined self esteem as the experience of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and being worthy of happiness. It affects every aspect of our lives. It therefore means that our level of self esteem influences the way we see the world and how we interpret each situation we find ourselves in. The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (2006) posit that without a high level of self esteem, romantic relationships can become frightening disappointments rather than sources of security, support and happiness. And Dowdy and Kliever (1998) argued that high self esteem promotes happiness, mental health and life satisfaction. Thus, at least a moderate level of self esteem seems to be a prerequisite for prospering romantic relationships.

Emotional health refers to an expression of our emotions and signifies a successful adaptation to a range of demands (Thomson, 2007).

The World Health Organization (2005) defines emotional health as a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his/her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make contributions to his/her community. According to Richards, Campania and Muse- Burke ( 2010), there is growing evidence that emotional abilities are associated with pro-social behaviors. Pope and Bietman (1999) posit that adolescents who can regulate their behaviors and emotions are more likely to be viewed positively by peers and romantic partners and less likely to have problems in their relationships.

Social competence refers to the social, emotional, and cognitive skills and behaviours that people need for successful social adaptation. Rubin and Smith (1988) argued that to achieve personal goals in social interaction while at the same time maintaining positive relationships with others over time and across situations require social competence. And Murphy, Shepherd, Eisenberg, Fabes and Guthrie (1990) argued that empathy, a component of

social skills, is a key to successful relationship of all kinds – including romantic relationships.

Adolescents (and people in general) complain about not achieving the results they want in their careers, with their bodies, or with their friends and intimate partners (National Centre for Injury Prevention and Control, 2006). Most of all people complain when their most intimate relationships do not work the way they would like them to. In these situations, it is easy to blame partners, and perceived relationship difficulties may be due to their own levels of self esteem, emotional health, and social competence. The importance of self esteem, emotional well-being and social competence cuts across every aspects of our lives as humans. For example, navigating through the world of sexual activities and behaviour to achieve success, prevent sexual risk-taking behaviours, and ensure satisfaction immediately and in later lives require some levels of self esteem (Dowdy and Kliever,1998), emotional health (Richards et al, 2010), and social competence ( Engels, Finkenaur, Meeus, and Dekovic, 2001). Inadequacies or shortages in any of these psychological concepts may be detrimental to the sustenance of romantic relationship and in fact, survival. They may also have telling consequences on the larger society in the areas of crime and population control. This study therefore purpose to examine the individual and joint effects of the personality traits of self esteem, emotional health, and social competence on romantic relationships of adolescents in Nigeria as there is dearth of such research in Nigeria. It is hoped that findings from the study would be useful in counseling and sensitizing adolescents before they venture into the dating business so that the negative consequences of unpleasant romantic relationship as a result of personality maladjustments can be minimized

### Methods

**Research Design:** The study is a survey research adopting the factorial design. This design makes it possible to test for main and interaction effects of the independent variables (self esteem, emotional health, and social competence) on the dependent variable (romantic relationship).

**Participants:** A sample of 248 research participants was randomly selected from among the students of Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria. The sample consists of 111 male and 137 female participants. Their age ranges between 16 and 29 years and their mean age is 20.52 years.

**Measures:** A questionnaire comprising of five sections was used for this study. Single item variables of sex, age, and relationship status were contained in section A of the questionnaire. Section B consists of 11 items that form the Relationship Scale Questionnaire (RSQ), developed by Griffin & Bartholomew in 1994. Items in the scale include: “I find it very easy to get emotionally close to others”, and “ I worry about having others not accept me”, with the response options ranging from “Not at all” to “Very much”. The items were subjected to Cronbach alpha reliability test to ascertain its reliability. A coefficient of 0.47 was found. Thus, the scale is reliable.

Section C, D, and E of the questionnaire consisted of Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), General Health Questionnaire (GHQ), and Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) respectively.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) was developed by Rosenberg (1986). It is a 10 items, four-point likert format scale with response categories ranging from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’. Five of the statement items on the scale assesses positive self image while the other five assesses negative self image. The author reported a Cronbach alpha reliability of between 0.77 to 0.88 and test –retest reliability typically ranging from 0.82 to 0.88. A Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of 0.57 was recorded for the scale in this study.

The General Health Questionnaire was developed by Goldberg et al (1978). It is a 12-item questionnaire which assesses mental well-being with each item being followed by four possible responses, typically being “much less than usual”, “same as usual”, “more than usual”, and “much more than usual” . Five of the items assess positive mental well-being while the remaining seven items assesses negative mental well-being. A Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of 0.57 was also recorded for this scale in this study.

The Social Interaction Anxiety Scale was designed by Mattick & Clark (1989). It is a 20-item questionnaire (out of which 10 items were adjudged as most relevant for this study by a conference of experts including Psychologists, Linguistics, and Guidance Counselors). The Social Interaction Anxiety Scale was designed to assess symptoms of anxiety in social interaction. Each item is accompanied by four options, which are “Not at all characteristic or true of me”, “Slightly moderately characteristic or true of me”, “Very Characteristic or true of me”, and “Extremely characteristic or true of me”. Seven of the items are negatively worded and 3 positively worded. Items on the scale include “I find it easy to make friends of my own

age, when mixing in a group, “I find myself worrying I will be ignored” etc. For this study, a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of 0.53 was recorded for this scale.

**Procedure for data collection:** The researcher personally administered the questionnaire to the respondents. Most of the respondents were found around the lecture rooms at the Ekiti State University campus. The researcher also personally retrieved the questionnaire from the respondents and thanked them for their participation. In all, two hundred and eighty-five questionnaires were administered to the respondents. By the time of retrieval however, only two hundred and forty-eight questionnaires were correctly filled and found good for analysis and analyzed.

**Data Analysis Method:** Data collected from the field were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The four hypotheses generated were analyzed using a two-way Analysis of Variance (2x2x2) (ANOVA). Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, 17.0 Version) was used for the data analysis to ensure accuracy.

## Results

This study examined the effect of self esteem, social competence and emotional health on romantic relationship of adolescents.

The first hypothesis stated that self-esteem would significantly affect romantic relationship of adolescents in Nigeria,

The second hypothesis stated that there would be a significant effect of emotional health on romantic relationship of adolescents in Nigeria,

The third hypothesis stated that there would be a significant effect of social competence on romantic relationship of adolescents in Nigeria, and The fourth hypothesis stated that self-esteem, emotional health and social competence would significant jointly affect romantic relationship of adolescents in Nigeria.

These stated hypotheses are subjected to test and results of data analyses are presented on tables1 and 2 below:

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics Table Showing the Mean and Standard Deviation of the Effects of Self-Esteem, Social Competence and Emotional Health on Romantic Relationship of Adolescents in Nigeria.

SELF ESTEEM	SOCIAL COMPETENCE	EMOTIONAL HEALTH	MEAN	STD DEV.	N
LOW	LOW	LOW	30.8621	6.26626	29
		HIGH	33.1053	7.57844	19
	TOTAL		31.7500	6.82767	48
	HIGH	LOW	30.6452	5.90790	31
		HIGH	30.7111	5.59067	45
TOTAL		30.6842	5.68322	76	
	LOW	LOW	30.7500	6.03275	60
		HIGH	31.4219	6.28125	64
	TOTAL		31.0968	6.14648	124
	HIGH	LOW	32.7419	5.77332	31
		HIGH	34.6486	6.85653	37
TOTAL		33.7794	6.41092	68	
	HIGH	LOW	30.3125	5.82784	32
		HIGH	29.7083	6.36894	24
	TOTAL		30.0536	6.01640	56
	HIGH	LOW	31.5079	5.88293	63
		HIGH	32.7049	7.04827	61
TOTAL		32.0968	6.48378	124	
TOTAL	LOW	LOW	31.8333	6.03989	60
		HIGH	34.1250	7.07894	56
	TOTAL		32.9397	6.63363	116
	HIGH	LOW	30.4762	5.822225	63
		HIGH	30.3623	5.84599	69
TOTAL		30.4167	5.81265	132	
	HIGH	LOW	31.1382	5.94417	123
		HIGH	32.0480	6.67066	125
	TOTAL		31.5968	6.32445	284

**Table 2:** Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Table Showing the Main and Interaction Effects Self-Esteem, Emotional Health and Social Competence on Romantic Relationship of Adolescents in Nigeria.

SOURCE	TYPE III SUM OF SQUARES	df	MEAN	F	p
LEVEL OF SELF-ESTEEM	15.920	1	15.920	.414	>.05
LEVEL OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE	363.835	1	363.835	9.457	<.05
LEVEL OF EMOTIONAL HEALTH	47.642	1	47.642	1.238	<.05
SELF-ESTEEM * SOCIAL COMPETENCE	82.708	1	82.708	2.150	<.05
SELF – ESTEEM * EMOTIONAL HEALTH	3.701	1	3.701	.096	>.05
SOCIAL COMPETENCE * EMOTIONAL HEALTH	80.273	1	80.273	2.086	<.05
SELF-ESTEEM * SOCIAL COMPETENCE * EMOTIONAL HEALTH	.407	1	.407	.011	>.05
ERROR	9233.780	240	38.474		
TOTAL	9879.677	247			

From table 2 above, the result showed that social competence and emotional health had significant main effect on romantic relationship of adolescents in Nigeria [F (1,240) = 9.457; p<.05] and [F (1,240) = 1.238; p <.05] respectively. However, self-esteem had no significant main effect on romantic relationship [F (1,240) = 0.414; p >.05]. Also, from the table, it is revealed that there was a significant interaction effect of self-esteem and social competence on romantic relationship of adolescents in Nigeria [F (1,240) = 2.150; P <.05], and that there was a significant interaction effect of social competence and emotional health on romantic relationship of adolescents in Nigeria [F (1,240) = 2.086;P < .05]. However, there was no significant interaction effect of self-esteem and emotional health on romantic



relationship of adolescents in Nigeria [ $F(1,240) = .096; P > .05$ ]. Lastly, there was no significant joint interaction effects of self-esteem, social competence, and emotional health on romantic relationship of adolescents in Nigeria [ $F(1,240) = .011; P > .05$ ].

### **Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations**

**Discussion:** Results from data analyses revealed that there is no significant effect of self-esteem on romantic relationship of adolescents in Nigeria. This finding is contrary to the findings of previous studies. For example, Burks, Dodge and Price (1998), in a study of self-esteem and relationships among adolescents found that people with low self-esteem experience negative emotions more often than people with high self-esteem and that they are less motivated than people with high self-esteem to repair their negative moods. According to them therefore, flourishing relationships are, to a large degree, dependent on positive moods and attitudes of the partners involved. Similarly, Richards, Butler & Gross (2006), found that optimism, a reflection of self-esteem, is an important contributor to relationship's long-term success and satisfaction. Also, Brown & Dutton (1995), found that personal failure in relationships make low self-esteem individuals feel even worse compared to high self-esteem people, probably because low self-esteem participants were less apt than high self-esteem participants to use effective coping mechanisms such as making external attributions for their failures.

Although the measures used by the present study and most of the previous studies are consistent (Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale), the variation in findings may be attributable to differences in the environmental conditions in which the researches were conducted and more importantly, differences in the socio-cultural values, beliefs and attitudes of the research participants used in the present study and previous ones. The bulk of work done so far on adolescent relationships and bonding were conducted using the whites in Europe and America as research participants as against the black Nigerian research participants of the present study. Adebayo and Ogunleye (2008) argued that Nigerians are motivated by lower order needs like safety and physiological needs whereas most whites in advanced democracies are motivated by higher order needs like esteem need and self actualization. Thus, rather than their romantic relationships being affected by self esteem, Nigerians relationships may be more influenced by monetary reward capabilities of partners and driven by a desire to satisfy their own selfish needs.

Results of a test of hypothesis two of this study revealed that emotional health had a significant effect on romantic relationship of adolescents in Nigeria. This finding is corroborated by the findings of Pope and Bierman (1999) who in their analytical study of aggression and romantic relationship, found that adolescents who can regulate their behavior and emotions are more likely to be viewed positively by peers and less likely to have problems in their relationships. They further suggested that a balanced psychological wellbeing is a basic foundation upon which emotional ties and romantic involvements should be based. Furthermore, Carrell (1993) posited that romantic partners who are emotionally inconsistent (both over indulgent and demanding), lacking warmth, inconsiderate, angry or driven by their own selfish needs create an unpredictable hostile world for the other partner, which on the long run; strains the relationship. Also, Hazan and Shaver (1998) proposed that committed romantic relationships could be characterized as attachments, just as relationships between parent and child. Hence, they suggested that experiences with parents affect individual's expectations of romantic relationship. According to them, individuals who had secure relationships with parents (hence are emotionally stable) are more likely to have secure expectations of romantic relationships and develop attachments.

Results of the test of hypothesis three of this study revealed that social competence had a significant effect on romantic relationship of adolescents in Nigeria. This finding is consistent with the findings of Zahn-Waxler and Smith (1992), who in their work on adolescents' development and social ties, found that the parent-child relationship, which is the platform of socialization for young adolescents, is associated with the development of such social skills as conflict resolution and intimacy, which serves as template for future relationships. Also, Engels, Finkenaur, Meeus, and Dekovic, (2001) found that as adolescents mature; their social skills are called upon to form and maintain relationships of all sorts (romantic relationship inclusive). Since the home is the platform of socialization and the parent-child relationship is essential for the development of social skills and social relationships (which is very important in the initiation and sustenance of romantic relationships), Franklin, Janoff-Bullman, and Robert (1990) found that children who grow up in divorced homes typically have less contact with the non-custodian parent and as time goes on, the parent-child relationship seems to further deteriorate-leaving a gap in the parental model that serves as the relationship template for all future relationships. Also, Nelson (1999) found that children

are more likely to develop similar problems involving intimacy and relationships modeled through the single parent. Sadly, too many of these sons and daughters end up having troubles in dating, establishing intimate relationships or feeling comfortable with their own sexuality which, to a large extent, are a reflection of their social skill development. Amato (2002) found that adults that were raised in divorced families suffer from a deficit in social skills and had special problems in handling conflict within their own relationships.

Results from hypothesis four of this study shows that there was no significant interaction effect of self-esteem, emotional health, and social competence on romantic relationship of adolescents in Nigeria. There seem to be a dearth of researches combining the identified IVs (self-esteem, emotion health and social competence) and testing their combined effect on romantic relationship. Findings from the present study revealed no significant interaction effect of self-esteem, emotional health and social competence on romantic relationship of adolescents whereas it was revealed that social competence and emotional health significantly interactively influence romantic relationship of adolescents and that self-esteem and social competence influence romantic relationship but that self-esteem does not individually influence romantic relationship and that self-esteem and emotional health do not interactively influence romantic relationship. From these findings therefore, one may be apt to reason that the no significant interaction effect of self-esteem, emotion health and social competence on romantic relationship of adolescents in Nigeria is due to the fact that Nigerians are characteristically hungry, greedy, corrupt and manipulable, according to Eze (1983), and that Nigerians are motivated by lower order needs (Adebayo & Ogunleye, 2008). The personality characteristics of Nigerians, as suggested by Eze (1983), may therefore predispose them to engaging in romantic relationships without any deep considerations of later life sexual satisfaction.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings from this study, it can be concluded that self-esteem does not affect the formation and sustenance of romantic relationship among adolescents in Nigeria. However, adolescents' emotional health significantly affects their formation and sustenance of romantic relationships. Also, from the study, it is revealed, that the social competence of adolescents is a

significant factor affecting their romantic relationship formation and sustenance in Nigeria.

No interaction effect of self-esteem and emotional health on romantic relationship of adolescents was observed. Similarly, there was no interaction effect of self-esteem, emotional health, and social competence on romantic relationships of adolescents. However, findings from the study revealed that there is a significant interaction effect of self-esteem and social competence on romantic relationships of adolescents. Lastly, there is a significant interaction effect of social competence and emotional health on romantic relationships of adolescents in Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings from this, the following recommendations are suggested:

- While healthy romantic relationships have many potential benefits for adolescents, unhealthy relationships (which results from a negative self-image, deficit in social skills and psychological wellbeing) pose risks that may have long lasting effects. Therefore, effort should be made by parents especially, to ensure that the much needed affection and attention, which are essential for their children's social skills acquisition and psychological well being, are put in place.
- Government and the society at large should make effort at reducing the rate of divorce in the society by providing an enabling environment for flourishing businesses so as to counter the effect of divorce on the children as children raised in divorce homes or by single parents end up having deficits in vital social skills which are important for a successful navigation of the social world. It is evident that most homes break as a result of poverty and economic down-trod.
- Government and Non-Governmental Organizations alike should provide facilities and embark on projects that involve the youth so as to reduce idleness. The NGOs should do more in stimulating awareness and educating the youths on how to go about their relationships so as to minimize undesirable outcomes. These youths should be educated on the need to have and maintain a positive self-

image before, during, and even after relationship break ups; this positive perception of self will help them to overcome whatever challenges and be optimistic about the future.

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