



Effects of parental and peer support on self-esteem in adolescents

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Foreword and Acknowledgement

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Abstract

Research has shown that those adolescents who have a good self-esteem are at better health, have better capacity to cope and have lower incidence of depressive symptoms. For these reasons it is important to promote self-esteem in adolescents by providing positive communication through supportive and caring relationships. The main purpose of the current study is to examine the influence of parental and peer support on the self-esteem in Icelandic adolescents. The main hypotheses are; those adolescents that receive parental support have higher self-esteem than those who do not receive parental support and; those adolescence that receive peer support have higher self-esteem than those adolescent who do not receive peer support. The present study is based on data from an Icelandic population-based survey in 2014, by The Icelandic Centre for Social Research and Analysis (ICSRA). A random sample of 2261 participants was used in the present study. The Rosenberg self-esteem scale was used to evaluate self-esteem. The results showed that parental and peer support had influence on self-esteem in adolescence. Those adolescents that received high support from their parents and peers, had higher self-esteem than those who did not receive support. Boys had higher self-esteem than girls and there was also a significant interaction between gender and support, showing that support from friends and parents had more impact on girls' self-esteem compared to boys.

Key words: Self-esteem, parental support, peer support

Abstract – Icelandic

Rannsóknir hafa sýnt að þeir unglingar sem eru með gott sjálfstraust búa að betri heilsu, eru seigari og hafa minni þunglyndiseinkenni. Vegna þessa er mikilvægt að efla sjálfstraust unglunga með jákvæðum samskiptum í gegnum sambönd sem einkennast af stuðning og umhyggju. Tilgangur þessarar rannsóknar er að skoða áhrif stuðnings foreldra og vina á sjálfstraust hjá íslenskum unglingum. Tilgátur rannsóknarinnar eru; þeir unglingar sem fá stuðning frá foreldrum eru með hærra sjálfstraust en þeir sem fá ekki stuðning og þeir unglingar sem fá stuðning frá vinum eru með hærra sjálfstraust en þeir sem fá ekki stuðning. Rannsóknin byggist á gögnum, frá Rannsóknnum og Greiningu, *Ungt Fólk 2004*. Þátttakendur í tilviljunarúrtakinu voru samtals 2261. Til þess að meta sjálfstraust var notast við Rosenberg sjálfstraust kvarðann. Niðurstöður rannsóknarinnar gáfu til kynna að stuðningur foreldra og vina hefur áhrif á sjálfstraust unglunga. Þeir unglingar sem fengu mikinn stuðning frá foreldrum og vinum voru með hærra sjálfstraust heldur en þeir sem fengu lítinn stuðning. Strákar voru með hærra sjálfstraust en stelpur og einnig voru marktæk samvirkniáhrif á milli kyns og stuðnings, sem sýnir, að stuðningur frá vinum og foreldrum hafði meiri áhrif á sjálfstraust hjá stelpum samanborið við stráka.

Lykilorð: sjálfstraust, stuðningur foreldra, stuðningur vina

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Effects of parental and peer support on self-esteem in adolescence

Adolescence is a time of change for individuals, as they deal with the physical, cognitive and social changes that occur during this developmental period. All of these changes can be stressful and individuals can feel less valuable than others, making them at risk for a lower self-esteem (Harter, 1985). Self-esteem is modified from childhood through the adolescent's life by social experiences that occur both outside and within the family (Rutter, 1987). Parental support is crucial in adolescence and parents could promote self-esteem in their children and reduce psychological distress by offering their support throughout this developmental phase (Boudreault-Bouchard et al., 2013).

It has been shown that adolescents and adults who have high self-esteem are at better health, have better capacity to cope and have lower incidence of depressive symptoms (Kaplan, Robbins, & Martin, 1983). Trzesniewski, Donnellan, Moffitt, Robins and Poulton (2006) found out that those adolescents that had low self-esteem had negative influence on their physical and emotional health. In this study low self-esteem during adolescence predicted poor health, criminal behavior and limited economic prospects during adulthood. Results from the same study also indicated that low self-esteem in adolescence, predicts negative outcomes in their adulthood. Other studies have found similar results, low self-esteem can affect adolescent social life and can lead to eating disorders, depression and suicidal thoughts (Mcgee & Williams, 2000).

It has been supported that self-esteem is an important mediator between social support and emotional adjustment both in early and late adolescence (Gaylord-Harden, Ragsdale, Mandara, Richards, & Petersen, 2007). The purpose in Gaylord et al study was to explore the extent to which self-esteem and ethnic identity mediate the relationship between peer and family support and anxiety and depression. Investigators proposed that support from family and peers would serve as a protective factor on depression and anxiety, which would promote

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better self-esteem and perception of their ethnic group. The results from this study demonstrated that both self-esteem and ethnic identity partially mediated the effects of perceived support on depression and anxiety, that means that social support is mediated through self-esteem (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2007).

Birndorf, Ryan, Auinger and Aten (2005) investigated adolescents who completed surveys in grades 8, 10 and 12. Changes in self-esteem were measured, and high and low self-esteem were compared. The results indicated gender differences, boys were found to have higher self-esteem than girls according to the study. The results also indicated that adults could promote self-esteem in adolescents by providing positive communication through supportive and caring relationships. According to the study adolescents in eighth grade who reported having a positive communication within the family were much more likely to report high self-esteem in the twelfth grade. The authors from this study suggested that community leaders and clinicians may promote self-esteem in their young adults. This should be done by encouraging schools, families and organizations in the community to pursue positive communications and to provide nurturing and safe environments because all of these factors can have huge impact on the adolescent's vulnerable self-esteem (Birndorf, Ryan, Auinger, & Aten, 2005).

Family is one of the most important factor that influences the self-esteem in adolescents. Researchers have studied and demonstrated the importance of the family during adolescence, with regard to parenting styles and their communications with the teenagers as well as the relationships with their siblings (Collins & Steinberg, 2007). Support from friends has also influence on self-esteem in adolescent especially in the adolescence years (Fabes, Carlo, Kupanoff, & Laible, 1999).

It has been shown that those adolescents that have close relationship with their parents are less likely to have social and psychological problems (Aufseeser, Jekielek, & Brown,

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2006) and those adolescent, who are carefully looked after by their parents, spend time with their family and get support from it, are less likely to have friends that have bad influence on them (Bryndís Björk Ásgeirsdóttir, Hera Hallbera Björnsdóttir, Inga Dóra Sigfúsdóttir, Jón Sigfússon og Stefán Hrafn Jónsson, 2003).

A study from 2011 indicated that relationships between adolescents and their parents play important role in the development of self-perception (Kokkinos & Hatzinikolaou, 2011). Participants in the study were young people from Greece and they wanted to study the importance of parenting styles on academic achievement, communication and self-esteem. Results indicated that adolescents who had warm and caring parents experienced more positive emotions and had better body image, which lead to higher self-esteem. On the other hand, adolescents who had experienced rejection from their parents and overprotection had lower self-esteem.

Siyez and others in 2008 investigated self-esteem in adolescents', problem behavior and perceived social support from parents and peers in 1734 college students (Siyez, 2008). The main purpose of the study was to examine what influences family conflict and what perceived support from parents and peers would have on adolescent self-esteem, depression and problem behavior. Another purpose was to see if there would be any difference in the results between boys and girls. Measures that were used in the study were multiple problem behavior index and self-esteem, depression, perceived parent social support, perceived peer social support, and family conflict subscales, which are included in the Adolescent Health and Development Questionnaire (AHDQ). The results in the study support the main hypothesis, that is, those adolescents who perceived a lot of family conflict within the family had lower self-esteem and higher level of depression than those who perceived little family conflict. Lower self-esteem and higher level of depression could then predict problem behavior for those adolescents who perceive family conflict. Those adolescents that received

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parental and peer support had higher self-esteem and fewer depressive symptoms. Regarding gender differences, girls perceived more peer support than boys but the results did not indicate gender difference regarding perceived parental support, family conflict, depression and self-esteem levels. Investigators in the study suggested that it would be good for individuals to support those friendships that they already have and that family conflict would need to be solved to strengthen general welfare for adolescents.

Other study from 1996 also indicated gender difference, that globally girls have lower self-esteem than boys. (Bolognini, Plancherel, Bettschart, & Halfon, 1996).

The studies that have been reviewed show similar results, that family, parents and peer attachment and communication are important regarding high self-esteem for adolescence. Therefore it is clear that the immediate environment of the adolescent, the family, parents and peers have the most influence on the self-esteem in adolescence. Due to these statements self-esteem should be talked about with high importance in all age groups, especially among young people because self-esteem plays a pivotal role in creating the type of person one becomes and how people feel through their lifespan.

The present study examines the relationship between self-esteem and parental and peer support. Correlation with different factors in parental and peer support on self-esteem will also be examined. The main hypotheses of the study are; those adolescents that receive parental support have higher self-esteem than those who do not perceive support and; those adolescents that receive peer support have higher self-esteem than those who do not perceive support.

Methods

Participants

The present study used a random sample survey data from the *youth in Iceland*

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population study, conducted by The Icelandic Centre for social research and analysis (ICSRA) in 2014 (Álfgeir Logi Kristjánsson et al., 2014). The population in their study was all Icelandic adolescents aged 13 to 16 years old (grades 8, 9 and 10) who were present in school at the day of the study. A total of 10,665 participants were included in the study 5255 boys and 5410 girls. Individuals who choose not to disclose their gender were 115 in total. Participants in the random sample used in the present study were 1110 boys (48,5%) and 1151 girls (50,3%), in total 2261. A total of 28 participants did not register their gender. Participants did not receive any payment for their participation in the study.

Measures

A detailed questionnaire was used in the original survey, containing 82 questions, of which only eight were used in the present study (see appendix A). There were two control variables in the study, age and gender. To evaluate self-esteem for participants the *Rosenberg Self Esteem scale* (RSE) was used. Participants were asked to rate on a four point Likert scale how well certain statements applied to them. An example of the questions is: - "I feel at least as important as others" Participants answered from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree). There were 10 questions in total that reflected on how participants felt about themselves.

Parental support was measured by five statements that asked participants how easy or difficult it was for them to receive the following from their parents: care and warmth, conversation about personal issues, advice on their studies, advice on other topics, and assistance to do various work. Participants answered on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (very difficult) to 4 (very easy).

Peer support was measured by five statements that asked participants how easy or difficult it was for them to receive the following from their parents: care and warmth, conversation about personal issues, advice on their studies, advice on other topics, and

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assistance to do various work. Participants answered on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (very difficult) to 4 (very easy).

Procedure

The study took place in every primary school in the country. The study was presented in the classroom on a regular school day, children that were in school that day participated, unless their parents did not want them to. Questionnaires were sent to all of the primary schools in the country and teachers in each class administered the questionnaire to the students. The students were asked to answer all the questions conscientiously and ask for help if needed. They were asked not to write their name or their social security number on the questionnaire, so it would not be possible to trace their answers. When the students finished filling the questions they were asked to put the questionnaires into unmarked envelope, seal the envelope and leave it behind as they walked out of the classroom.

Design and Data analysis

The current study is a cross-sectional anonymous self-report national survey. The data was analyzed with 2 x 2 fixed factor ANOVA, with gender (boys and girls) and support (high and low) as the between subject factors and with self-esteem as the dependent variable. Questions on parental and peer support were added and participants divided into two groups; high and low support using median split. Correlation between self-esteem and parental support and self-esteem and peer support was examined.

Results

The purpose of this study was to find out the influence of parental and peer support on self-esteem in adolescents. The data was analyzed with two 2x2 fixed factor ANOVA, with gender (boys and girls) and support (high and low) as the between subject factors for parental and peer support separately. The alpha level was set at .05.

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Table 1 shows overall means and standard deviation for the main variables of the study across gender.

Table 1.

Overall means and Standard deviation for the main variables in the study

	N	M	Range	SD
Self-esteem	2144	28,37	9-36	6,15
Parental support	2214	17,53	5-20	3,03
Peer support	2203	15,83	5-20	3,61

As can be seen in table 1 the mean for self-esteem was around 28,37, so majority of the participants have rather high self-esteem with the lowest being 9 and the highest 36. The means for parental and peer support are also rather high, around 17,53 and 15,83, which means most of the participants receive support from parents and friends, although the mean for peer support is slightly lower than the mean for parental support.

Table 2 shows means for adolescent's self-esteem for parental and peer support.

Table 2

Means for self-esteem by parental and peer support

	N	Boys		SD	Girls	
		Low/High			Low/High	
		M			M	SD
Parental support	466/532	28,00/31,63	5,55/4,65	501/586	24,43/29,13	6,43/5,66
Peer support	265/257	31,09/32,25	4,71/4,50	154/428	26,97/29,93	6,29/5,22

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The means in the table show that boys have higher self-esteem than girls in both parental support and peer support. For both girls and boys friends support matters more. The means for both girls and boys for friends support is higher than for parental support.

As can be seen in table 3 the relationship between the variables is slightly different for boys and girls regarding parental support. There is a significant positive correlation between the variables and self-esteem, which indicates that the more support participants receive from their parents the higher the self-esteem.

Table 3

Correlation between self-esteem and parental support by gender

	<u>Boys</u>		<u>Girls</u>	
	r	p	r	p
Care and warmth	.374	.000	.323	.000
Conversation about personal issues	.322	.000	.367	.000
Advise on study	.316	.000	.312	.000
Advise on other topics	.361	.000	.329	.000
Assistance to do various jobs	.376	.000	.379	.000

As can be seen the correlation for boys is higher than for girls regarding parental support. The correlation is positive between factors. Among the highest correlation is assistance to do various jobs and among the lowest is advise on study for both boys and girls. It is interesting to see that conversations about personal issues are higher for girls than boys.

Looking at peer support it can be seen in table 4 that the relationship between self-esteem and peer support is positive, for both boys and girls, which indicates that the more support participants get from their peers, the higher self-esteem they have.

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Table 4

Correlation between self-esteem and peer support by gender

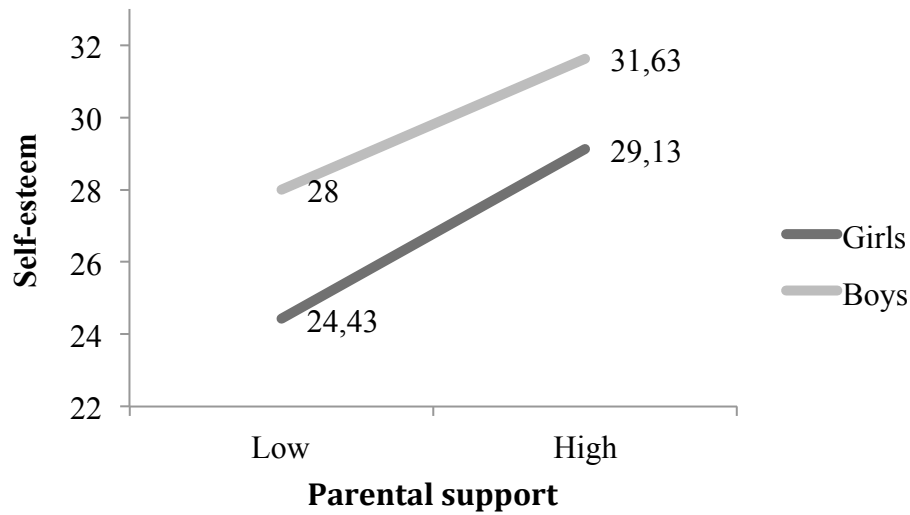
	<u>Boys</u>		<u>Girls</u>	
	r	p	r	p
Care and warmth	.339	.000	.286	.000
Conversation about personal issues	.270	.000	.239	.000
Advise on study	.285	.000	.314	.000
Advise on other topics	.291	.000	.318	.000
Assistance to do various jobs	.330	.000	.303	.000

Among the highest correlations are care and warmth for boys and advise on other topics for girls. When comparing parental and peer support, it is interesting to see that the correlation for conversations about personal issues are higher for parental support than for peer support, for both genders.

The results of the 2x2 ANOVA for parental support reveals that, the main effect of parental support was significant $F(1, 2081) = 285,97, p = .000, \eta^2 = .121$. The amount of self-esteem differed according to how much parental support the individual received, those who had high parental support had higher self-esteem than those who received low support. There was also a main effect for gender in parental support $F(1, 2081) = 151,67, p = .000, \eta^2 = .068$. Boys have higher self-esteem than girls. There was also a significant interaction effect between gender and parental support $F(1, 2081) = 4,806 p = .028, \eta^2 = .002$. As can be seen in Figure 1, although more parental support is connected with higher self-esteem for both girls and boys, it seems to matter more for girls.

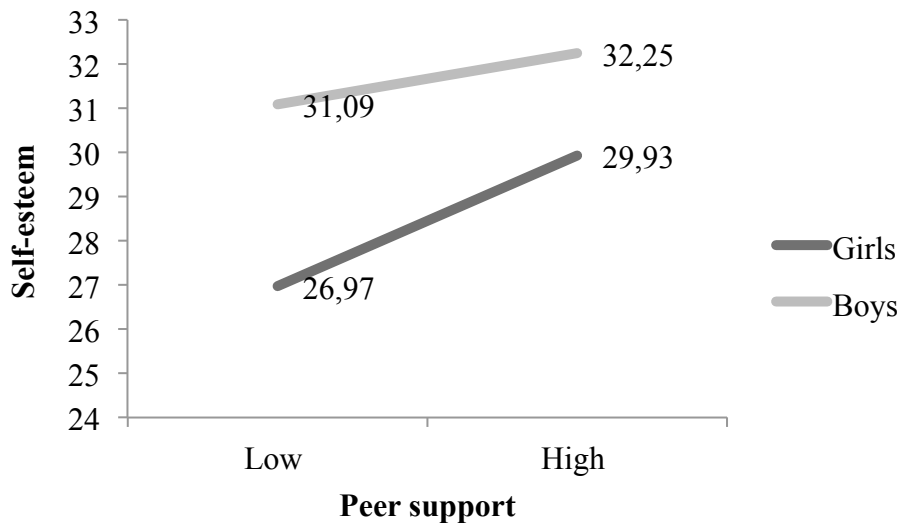
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Figure 1. Means for self-esteem and parental support



The results of the 2x2 ANOVA for peer support, reveals that, the main effect for peer support was significant $F(1,1010) = 96,08$ $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .035$. The amount of self-esteem differed according to how much peer support the individual received, those who had high peer support had higher self-esteem than those who received low peer support. The main effect for gender was also significant $F(1, 1100) = 96,082$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .080$, which indicates significant difference in mean self-esteem score for both boys and girls in peer support. There was a significant interaction between gender and peer support $F(1, 1100) = 7,53$, $p = .009$, $\eta^2 = .007$. As seen in figure 2 high peer support has a stronger impact on girls than boys.

Figure 2. Means for self-esteem and peer support



As can be seen in the figure, boys have higher self-esteem than girls. For boys there is less difference in high or low support than for girls in self-esteem.

Discussion

Researches have shown, that there are many factors that can influence the self-esteem in adolescents. Several studies have been conducted on this topic but the present study highlights the significant effect of various factors in parental support and peer support on self-esteem.

The aim of the current study was to examine if parental and peer support would have an impact on adolescent's self-esteem and to examine the correlation between self-esteem and various factors in parental and peer support. The main hypotheses were, that those adolescents that receive support from their parents have higher self-esteem than those who do not and those adolescents that receive support from their peers have higher self-esteem than those who do not. The results showed that the more support adolescents receive from their parents and peers, the higher the self-esteem. Parental and peer support had positive affect on self-esteem, the correlation for parental support was higher, indicating more importance for self-esteem, but both independent variables were significant. It was interesting to see the

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correlation between different factors in parental and peer support on self-esteem. Among the highest correlation in parental support was assistance to do various jobs and the lowest was advice on study. There were a lot of difference between boys and girls on the factors, conversation about personal issues and care and warmth. The correlation between self-esteem and conversation about personal issues was higher for girls than boys, and the correlation between self-esteem and care and warmth were higher for boys.

The first hypothesis was that those adolescents that receive support from their parents have higher self-esteem than those who do not receive support. The main effect of parental support was significant which supports the first hypothesis, but those participants who received high parental support had higher self-esteem than those who received low parental support. This result is consistent with the results of Kokkinos and Hatzinikolaou, (2011) where they found out that those adolescents that had warm and caring parents experienced more positive emotions and higher self-esteem than those adolescents who did not. This finding is also consistent with the results of Siyez, (2008) that indicated that those adolescents that receive parental and peer support have higher self-esteem and fewer symptoms of depression.

The second hypothesis in the study, which was, those adolescent who receive support from peers, have higher self-esteem than those who do not receive support is also consistent with the results from Siyez (2008). The main effect for peer support was significant which support the second hypothesis. Another study by Birndorf, Ryan, Auinger and Aten (2005), indicated that adults could promote self-esteem in adolescents by providing positive communication through supportive and caring relationships which is in accordance with results from current study.

The results from current study indicated gender differences in self-esteem. Boys have higher self-esteem overall than girls which is consistent with Birndorfs study in 2005 which

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stated that boys had higher self-esteem than girls. The interaction effect was significant for both parental and peer support, but peer support had more influence on girls than boys because there was no difference in high and low support in self-esteem for those boys who got low support and high support for their peers. Regarding the gender difference in peer support for adolescence in the current study, there were no studies found that showed that peer support matter more for girls on their self-esteem, but Siyez, (2008) indicated that girls did perceive more peer support than boys did.

The reason for this gender difference in peer support in the current study could be that girls tend to rely more on friends and share more personal issues and talk about difficulties which may occur. Boys tend to have a different kind of friendship with their friends.

The results from the current study indicate how important parental and peer support can be in the adolescent years. As Harter (1985) revealed, the adolescence years are a time of change for individuals because they are dealing with physical, cognitive and social changes, and these changes can be stressful making people feel less valuable than others which makes them at risk for a lower self-esteem (Harter, 1985). For that reason it is important to promote self-esteem in adolescents by providing positive communication through supportive and caring relationships. It is important because studies have shown that, low self-esteem can affect adolescent social life and can lead to eating disorders, depression and suicidal thoughts (Mcgee & Williams, 2000). Another study showed that adolescents and adults who have high self-esteem are at better health, have better capacity to cope and have lower incidence of depressive symptoms (Kaplan et al., 1983). For all of these results parents should be more alert in giving their children support in times of stress.

There are some limitations in this study, at first the study is a cross-sectional, which means that cause- and –effect relationships cannot be determined from the results. It cannot be known if high parental and peer support are promoting the high self-esteem for the

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adolescents or if those adolescents that have high self-esteem get more support from their parents and peers.

An important strength in this study is the big sample size, which makes the data represent this age group well. Another strength is that the study was anonymous, which increases the likelihood of students answering with honesty questions regarding sensitive matters, such as self-esteem.

It is important for future studies to investigate self-esteem for adolescence in more detail. This study investigated only parental and peer support, it would be interesting to look at other factors, such as physical activity, school performance and conditions at home. Future steps would then be to look at more factors to truly see which one has most influence on the adolescence self-esteem.

In conclusion, self-esteem should be taken seriously because those adolescents that have low self-esteem could be at risk for their mental health. For that reason it is important that self-esteem will be continued to be investigated.

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Appendix A

Chosen questions

35. Hversu vel eða illa finnst þér eftirfarandi fullyrðingar eiga við um þig?

(Merktu í EINN reit í hverjum lið)

	Á mjög vel við um mig	Á frekar vel við um mig	Á frekar illa við um mig	Á mjög illa við um mig
a) Mér finnst ég vera að minnsta kosti jafn mikils virði og aðrir	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Mér finnst ég hafa marga góða eiginleika	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Þegar allt kemur til alls sýnist mér ég vera misheppnaður/misheppnuð	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Ég get gert hlutina jafn vel og flestir aðrir	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Mér finnst það ekki vera margt sem ég get verið stolt(ur) af	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) Ég hef jákvæða afstöðu til sjálfs/sjálfrar mín	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g) Þegar allt kemur til alls er ég ánægð(ur) með sjálfa(n) mig	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h) Ég vildi óska að ég bæri meiri virðingu fyrir sjálfum mér	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i) Stundum finnst mér ég sannarlega vera til einskis nýt(ur)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

21. Hversu auðvelt eða erfitt væri fyrir þig að fá eftirtalið hjá foreldrum þínum?

(Merktu í EINN reit í hverjum lið)

	Mjög erfitt	Frekar erfitt	Frekar auðvelt	Mjög auðvelt
a) Umhyggju og hlýju	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Samræður um persónuleg málefni	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Ráðleggingar varðandi námið	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Ráðleggingar varðandi önnur verk (viðfangsefni) þín	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Aðstoð við ýmis verk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

PEER SUPPORT, PARENTAL SUPPORT AND SELF-ESTEEM

22. Hversu auðvelt eða erfitt væri fyrir þig að fá eftirtalið hjá vinum þínum?

(Merktu í EINN reit í hverjum lið)

	Mjög erfitt	Frekar erfitt	Frekar auðvelt	Mjög auðvelt
a) Umhyggju og hlýju	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Samræður um persónuleg málefni	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Ráðleggingar varðandi námið	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Ráðleggingar varðandi önnur verk (viðfangsefni) þín	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Aðstoð við ýmis verk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>