

Research Paper

Harmful Words: The Influence of Negative Language on Self-esteem and Mental Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

Language has a significant impact on one's perception towards self as well as mental health which ultimately has an adverse effect on the wellbeing of an individual. (Tanvir & Mitu, 2024). The present research emphasizes the patterns of negative language (harmful words) on self-esteem and mental wellbeing. To meet the aim of the study, a sample population of 200 students were randomly selected which belong to the age group of 15-24 years. The key findings indicated that there was a significant impact on mental wellbeing of males who were exposed to harmful words but had no impact on their self esteem. Whereas, females had no significant impact of harmful words on their self esteem or mental wellbeing.

Keywords: *Negative Language, Harmful Words, Self Esteem and Mental Well-Being*

In India's collectivist culture, harsh words from family, peers, or authority figures (e.g., "You'll never succeed") can deeply wound self-esteem, as identity is tied to social approval (Lee et al., 2007). Stigma around mental health and pressure to meet rigid academic/ societal expectations amplify shame, silencing victims and worsening anxiety or depression (Volkow et al., 2021). Traditional hierarchies often normalize criticism, leaving lasting scars on well-being. Children are most vulnerable—studies show that verbal abuse in childhood (like yelling or insults) can harm mental health for years. Hurtful words—like insults, mean names, or judgmental comments—can deeply damage how people see themselves and their mental health. When someone hears negative words repeatedly, they might start to believe things like "I'm not good enough" or "I'll never succeed" which impacts an individual's wellbeing.

The spectrum of mental health wellbeing includes resilience, emotional regulation, and effective self-management (Manwell et al., 2015). Maintaining well-being requires intentional effort, which includes fostering relationships, engaging in fulfilling activities, and attending to one's physical and mental health (Shim et al., 2022). According to the

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WHO, maintaining one's health is a fundamental human right that depends on both material and social resources (World Health Organization: WHO, 2022). Burnett and McCrindle (year) in their study, examined the impact of self-talk on self esteem. The research also emphasized that words coming from the significant others within the surroundings can affect self esteem as well. Parents, peers, or other senior people present within the environment have a significant impact on the wellbeing of an individual (Kapoor & Sethi, 2024). (Yun, Shim, & Jeong 2019) investigated the effects of verbal abuse on social interactions, mental health, and perceived abuse and concluded that peer abuse results in restlessness and annoyance. While parental and senior peoples abuse was found to elicit melancholy and hyperactivity within an individual and feelings of guilt and worthlessness exacerbated anxiety and sadness, and low self-esteem was a major contributing factor among students and Many students turned to excessive smartphone use as a coping strategy, which disrupted their regular routines and caused withdrawal symptoms. (Brodski and Hutz 2012) investigated how parenting practices affected the well-being, self-esteem, and emotional abuse (EA) of 293 college students (34.6% male, 65.4% female). According to the study, careless and authoritarian parenting was linked to higher Emotional Abuse and worse self-esteem, whereas authoritative and indulgent parenting was linked to reduced Emotional Abuse. The children of both authoritarian as well as careless parents express poorer life satisfaction, more negative affect, and less positive affect who were exposed to negative languages. Campbell and Fehr (1990) investigate in a research that low self-esteem (LSE) people performed better at judging the positivity of observer judgments but were less successful at forecasting their partners' assessments.. (Nwankwo 2018) investigated the connection between psychological well-being, social support, and verbal abuse from parents and in this a study well-being and social support has an inverse relationship with verbal abuse on mental health. Eliasson et al. (2005) examined the effects of verbal abuse on academic wellbeing, emphasizing the disparities across genders. In a study of Chinese adolescents, Chen et al. (2022) highlights the protective role of self-esteem by demonstrating that it partially offset the detrimental impacts of psychological abuse on social support.

METHODOLOGY

Objective

- To understand the impact of exposure to negative language on self-esteem.
- To understand the impact of exposure to negative language on mental wellbeing.

Hypotheses

- There will be a positive impact of exposure to negative language on self-esteem among males and females.
- There will be a positive impact of exposure to negative language on mental wellbeing of males and females.

Variables

- **Independent Variables:** Self Esteem and Verbal Abuse.
- **Dependent Variables:** Self Acceptance, Personal Growth, and Positive Relation.

Sample

The study comprised a sample of 200 College Students, with 103 males (51.5%) and 94 females (47%), aged between 15 and 24 years. Participants were selected using stratified random sampling.

Inclusion Criteria

- Participants ranging from age 15 years to 24 years.
- Participants should have minimum qualification of matriculation.
- All the participants should be residents of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.
- Participants should be belonging to the urban population and with high or medium socio-economic data.
- Participants should be both mentally and physically fit.

Tools

A total number of three scales were administered:

1. Verbal Abuse Question (VAQ)
2. Rosenberg Self Esteem (RSE)
3. Ryff's Psychological Well-Being (PWB).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

TABLE – 1

		V A	RS E	PWB (Autono my)	PWB (ENV IO RME NT)	PWB (PERSO NAL GROWT H)	PWB (POSTI VE RELATI ON)	PWB (PURP OSE IN LIFE)	PWB (SELF- ACCEPTA NCE)
H A (F)	Pearso n Correla tion	1	0.0 95	-0.046	0.086	0.119	0.065	0.024	0.034
	Sig. (2- tailed)		0.3 63	0.659	0.409	0.255	0.536	0.818	0.748
	N	9 4	94	94	94	94	94	94	94
H A (M)	Pearso n Correla tion	1	0.0 57	-0.046	0.088	.397**	.264**	.317**	.275**
	Sig. (2- tailed)		0.5 66	0.647	0.379	0.000	0.007	0.001	0.005
	N	1 0 3	103	103	103	103	103	103	103

The analysis of this data has elicited the relationship between Self Esteem, Mental Well-Being and negative language among females and male. The key findings indicate that there is no significant relationship found between negative language on self-esteem as well as mental health wellbeing among the females. For the male sample, correlation had been performed. Negative language do not correlate with self-esteem, but it significantly correlates with personal growth ($r=0.397$, $p=0.01$), positive relationships ($r=0.264$, $p=0.01$), life purpose ($r=0.317$, $p=0.01$), self-acceptance ($r=0.275$, $p=0.01$).

Interpretation

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of negative language exposure on a self-Esteem and mental well-being and the key finding of this study was that there is no

correlation between negative language and self-esteem among male and female and there is a study where there is no correlation between negative language on self-esteem. (Litasari, Juliningrum, & Septiyono, 2022) investigate the Relationship Between Parental Verbal Abuse and Self Esteem in Adolescent in Out of the 152 students in the sample, 79 were male and 73 were female. The key findings indicated that 93% of parents verbally abused their children, that adolescents' self-esteem reached high levels of up to 89%, and that there was no correlation between the variables of parental verbal abuse and teenage self-esteem (p -value = 0.0246).

The second key finding of this study was there is no correlation between negative language and Self-esteem among female but there is correlation among male. These associations included negative language and PWB Personal Growth ($r^2 = 0.150$, $p = 0.01$); negative language and PWB Positive Relation ($r^2 = 0.070$, $p = 0.01$); negative language and PWB Self-Acceptance ($r^2 = 0.075$, $p = 0.01$); and negative language and PWB Purpose in Life ($r^2 = 0.101$, $p = 0.01$) and there is a no study where there is no correlation between negative language on mental well-being among female. But there is a study where there is correlation between negative language on mental well-being among male. (Perlis et al., 2010) investigate the impact of peer verbal abuse during childhood on mental health and brain structure in young adult and 848 young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 who have never experienced physical or sexual abuse at home or from their parents. The study's findings highlight the substantial influence of peer relationships on mental health by showing that verbal abuse by peers throughout crucial developmental stages is linked to increased psychiatric symptoms and significant changes in brain structure. (Eliasson et al., 2005) investigate in the study verbal abuse, gender and wellbeing at school. A self-administered questionnaire was filled out by 1,006 pupils between the ages of 12 and 15, with an 84% response rate. The majority of student verbal abuse is masculine in nature, and it is especially noticeable in older pupils. For both boys and girls, it has a negative effect on their well-being and school satisfaction, even if it is not frequent, persistent, or combined with other types of harassment.

CONCLUSION

The result of this study suggested that negative language can't effect on self-esteem among male and female and also negative language can't effect on mental well-being among female but can effect among male and as we know that India is collectivist culture and These findings suggest that, in the Indian cultural setting, there may be a gender difference in emotional sensitivity to negative language. In India, gender roles and cultural norms may have an impact on how people internalize and react to harmful language. To provide a more thorough understanding, future studies could examine these processes in greater detail while taking into account additional factors including age, geographic origin, and social support networks.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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