COUNSELLING SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH LOW SELF-ESTEEM FOR HEALTHY ADJUSTMENT: A COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY APPROACH

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Abstract
Low self–esteem is a problem that has effect on secondary school students in their adolescence stage of development. Students during this stage may have erroneous perception about their body shape, physical appearance, identity and their ability to carry out any task assigned to them and relationship they form with others. Due to the faulty cognition of their self–esteem, this could create a problem for them and also hinder them from developing a healthy self-esteem needed to fully actualise their potentiality. The emphasis of unconditional love, in parenting represents the importance of a child developing a stable sense of being care for and respected, while the opposite is the case of conditional love from parents. These feelings translate into later effects on the child self–esteem as they grow older. Individual self–esteem has profound consequences for every aspect of human existence, and more pointedly, one cannot think of a single psychological problem- from anxiety and depression, to fear of intimacy or of success, child molestation that is not traceable to the problem of low self-esteem. Students would be better off, if they stopped trying to convince themselves that they are worthless, and that rising self-esteem would help to solve many social and psychological problems, including crime, teen pregnancy, drug abuse, and school underachievement. Therefore, this papers examine the causes of low self-esteem, characteristic of students with low self-esteem and cognitive behavioural approach in enhancing low self-esteem. Finally conclusions with some recommendation were made.

Introduction
In the early years of a child’s life, parents are the most significant influence on self–esteem development and the main source of positive and negative experience a child will acquire. The emphasis of unconditional love, in parenting represents the importance of a child developing a stable sense of being care for and respected, while the opposite is the case of conditional love from parents. These feelings translate into later effects on the child self–esteem as they grow older (Olsen, Breckler & Wiggens, 2008). Parenting style can also play a crucial role in self esteem development. Students who have healthy self-
Esteem tend to be having parents, who are caring, supportive adults who set clear standard and allow them to voice out their opinion on decision making. Low self-esteem in students tends to be related to physical punishment and withholding love and affection by parents. Mclead (2012) citing Rogers in 1963, would describe this as conditional positive regard whereby individual only receive positive attention from significant other (such as parents, teachers) when they act in certain way. This reinforces the child to believe that they are only a person of value when they act in certain way. Swenson and Prelow (2003) argue that life satisfaction, happiness, healthy behavioural practises, perceive efficacy and academic success and adjustment have being associated with healthy self- esteem and the reverse is the case of low self-esteem.

However, Nathaniel (1994), a leading figure in the self-esteem movement, stated categorically that an individual self-esteem has profound consequences for every aspect of human existence, and more pointedly, that he cannot think of a single psychological problem- from anxiety and depression, to fear of intimacy or of success, child molestation that is not traceable to the problem of low self-esteem. Eminent clinical psychologist, Ellis (2001) is convinced that self-esteem is the greatest sickness known to man or woman because it’s conditioned. According to Ellis, people would be better off, if they stopped trying to convince themselves that they are worthless. Vasconceilos (1990) argued that rising self-esteem would help to solve many social and psychological problems, including crime, teen pregnancy, drug abuse, and school underachievement. Vasconceilos also speculated that healthy self-esteem might protect student from being overwhelmed by life’s challenges and this reduce failure and misbehaviour, much as a vaccine protects against disease.

Research on gender difference on self-esteem reported that male students have higher self-esteem than female students (Young & Mroczek, 2003), however in some studies the gender difference was small (Quatman, Sampson, Robinson & Watson, 2001). According to Gotosee web survey on gender difference on self-esteem, it was reported that 45% of male have low self-esteem and 7 out of 10 females also have low self-esteem. In the same vein, Santrock (2007), adolescent girls and boys have low self-esteem from the age of thirteen to eighteen and that the self-esteem of girls is as twice as low as those of boys. Rothman (2008) posits that as many as 50% of secondary school students are at risk in school because of low self-esteem. They are easily influenced or manipulated by others and are often subjected to be scapegoat by others. They can be observed either withdrawing from social contact or attempting to prove their significance by showing off. In other word, low self-esteem is detrimental to the student’s psychological well being and others, which can make students suffering from low self-esteem, behave in an anti-social ways against the societal expectations.

Jennifer, Sanel, Laura and Kamini (2004) also reviewed that self-esteem can be important in terms of how one think, feels and responds to life events. It is crucial to the mental and social well being. It also influences aspirations, personal goals and interaction with others. The most basic task for one’s mental, emotional, social being which begins in infancy and continues until one dies, is the construction of his/her self-esteem (McAdams, 1994). The beliefs and evaluation students hold about themselves determine who they are, what they can do and what they can become. Mclead (2012) is of the opinion that students with low self-esteem relay on coping strategies that are counter-productive such as bullying, cheating, avoiding social situation as well as taking up responsibilities. Although all students will display some of these behaviour at times; low self-esteem is a strongly indicator when these behaviour appear with regularity. Socially students with low self-esteem can easily withdraw from challenging situations and find it difficult to have fun (Nwankwo, Anyamene & Idigun, 2016). They may have a wide circles of friends, and they are more likely to yield to group pressure and more vulnerable to being bullied. At school they avoid trying new things for fear and will give up easily.
Causes of Low Self Esteem
Low self-esteem can have a deeply negative impact on a secondary student’s life and affect all aspects of his existence. Low self-esteem is caused by certain factors depending on the background and status of the person, his surroundings and association with the outside world and varied experiences in childhood and adolescence. Laishram (2013), identified the following as the cause of low self-esteem:

1) Child Abuse and Punishment: Most secondary students with low self-esteem have a history of both physical and mental abuse during their childhood. Abuse of any kind gives a child the impression that he is simply a thing to be used and punished and that in some way he deserves it. The effects of abuse are deep-rooted and extremely difficult to treat. The most likely culprits of child abuse are family friends, relative, strange and foster or step-parent.

2) Negligence: Every child requires love, attention, praise and affection, while growing up so that he can develop a positive sense of self, but when children are brought up in conditions where love and affection is lacking and their emotional and physical needs are not fulfilled, they feel abandoned, insecure and insignificant. They feel it very difficult to trust people, fear that they will be abandoned again. This then hampers their ability to mix with others and leads to antisocial traits which could ultimately lead to low self-esteem.

3) Excessive Criticism: When a child is constantly reminded that he is no good, it results in the child feeling inadequate and loss his self-confidence. Such events create a feeling of worthlessness, making them pessimistic and hesitant from doing anything positive.

4) Comparison with Others: Being compared to others (especially siblings) and constantly being told that they are not as good then, or asked to be “more like them” can cause a child to lose confidence in his abilities.

5) Expectations: Some parents may have certain expectations from their child (realistic or otherwise). If a child is not able to fulfill these, he gets the feeling of having let down his parents. It usually happens in case of parents who tend to influence a child with the reflection of unfulfilled dreams.

6) Physical Appearance: Since one’s face is the first thing that leads to forming an impression, many people with a not so attractive physical appearance may tend to feel inferior when compared to a better looking person. Some may then try and isolate themselves from an active social life and retreat to a shell.

7) Peer Pressure and Bullying: peer pressure can lead to a lot of internal battles within a person, especially when it is an activity that individual do not want to indulge in. This can lead to stress and anxiety of standing up to a group and cause for a falling out with them, thus giving individual a sense of failure. Similarly facing bullying is similar to abuse and can lead to the same effects at that of abuse.

8) Financial and Social Position: Belonging to the lower strata of society in terms of financial or social position can lead to an inferiority complex in a person. This is especially true if an individual peer enjoy a better standard in society. This might cause the individual to develop low self-image and overtime a lower self-esteem.

9) Achievement: People work to achieve success in their life and when they fail after working hard, they treat failure as the ultimate truth which result in loss of self-esteem.

Characteristic of a Person with Low Self-Esteem
There are certain characteristic that a person with low self-esteem will exhibit, according to Laishram (2013), they are as follows:

1. They lack social skills and self-confidence. This makes them avoid social settings.
2. They are highly sensitive to criticism and lack the ability to take it in the form of constructive criticism.
3. They tend to be very hostile and go on the defensive whenever faced with negative situation.
4. They overanalyse and over think their problems, making them preoccupied with their own problems.
5. They might exhibit physical symptoms such as fatigue, headaches and insomnia.
6. They are prone to harbour several negative traits about themselves like feeling worthless, unloved and incompetent.
7. They are prone to negative thinking and being pessimistic and also harbour a lot of fears about varied things.
8. They are always anxious and fearful. They also tend to be overly sensitive wherein they take everything personally.

Steps in Enhancing Low Self-Esteem

The school counsellors could use the following steps identified by Spelt (2005) when he used cognitive behaviour therapy in enhancing the self esteem of secondary school students.

1) Stop criticism
   a. Stop self criticism: - student should be taught on how to stop criticising themselves. Self-criticism could result mistakes in the past, failures and students own weakness. The consequences are almost always negligible. If the self-criticism were warranted, encourage students to objectively evaluate the consequences of the weakness, mistakes and failures. The counsellor will help client to stop berating themselves by asking them “what is the harm in that mistake” usually the only harm is their berating themselves and clients can stop berating themselves and still exhibit weakness, mistakes and failures.
   b. Criticism from others: the counsellor should ask clients about the criticism they received from others during the course of interaction. If clients believes erroneous criticism, try to convince the client that the criticism were erroneous. If the criticism were valid, help clients to accept the criticism without berating themselves.
   c. Question clients’ report of being criticised: ask exactly what the other person said. If the client misinterpreted a natural comment as a criticism, correct that misinterpretation. Counsellor could ask client’s repeat exactly what was said and find that the client had actually misinterpreted a compliment as a criticism.

2) Success and Failure
   The school counsellor should help clients to stop believing they have failed when they have not. Low self-esteem clients tend to experience success in actual events, experience neutral events as failures and experiences failure as catastrophes.
   a. Help client to give themselves credits for their success: low self-esteem clients tend to attribute success to luck or the ease of the task or the inadequacy of the competition or to anything but their own competence. Once low self-esteem clients do admit to a success, frequently remind them of their success and help them to enjoy the success. Encourage these clients to stop spending 90% of the time thinking about the 10% of their life that is not going well.
   b. Convince low self-esteem clients to stop experiencing activities as test of their worth and stop making play into work. The school counsellor should help these clients to stop viewing themselves as inferior to others who are better than they are at any task. Some individuals are better than other individuals at some things but no one is better person than anyone else. Comparing oneself to other is meaningless and counter-productive. Clients should try to do the best they can and be comfortable with themselves when they succeed and when they fail.

3) Skills and skill deficits
   A reasonable amount of success helps clients to maintain self acceptance. Many clients need help with some skill training of course the therapist must have the skill to teach it to clients.
   a. Avoidance and skill deficits are reciprocal causes of each other: low self-esteem cause clients to avoid situations which may evoke the feeling of low self-esteem. But avoiding these situations
prevent client from developing skills which help them achieve success and self acceptance. Tell clients “the only way to develop skill is to practise and the most skilled person was a beginner.”

b. Help low self-esteem clients to be open their weakness, mistakes and failure, when client begins to hide weakness, mistakes and failures, this intensifier their feelings of low self-esteem and shame.

Conclusion
Convince low self-esteem clients to stop trying to be and say what they think other want them to be and say. If clients are constantly censoring themselves or trying to be something they are not, they will perform much more poorly and create the very failure they fear. Encourage these clients to be themselves, and let others like or dislike them as they are. The more clients try to be and say what other want, the more clients will feel that they are inadequate as they are. In addition, rejection and criticism provide opportunities for low self-esteem students to practice opportunities for low self-esteem students to practice accepting themselves when other do not.

Recommendations
The following recommendations are hereby offered to enhance the self-esteem of secondary school students.

1. The school counselor should encourage students to accept their body physic as they have being created in a unique way.
2. Parents need to be sensitised not to expect too much from their school children as well as not comparing them with other children which ability is beyond their children.
3. School teachers should learn to be constructive in their criticism of students and their appraisal of students should be based on unconditional positive regard.
4. Secondary school students should learn how to be assertive in their dealing with other students that is they should express their feeling at will without any fear of compromise.
5. Parents and teachers should show love, care and attention to secondary school student and shun neglecting them.
REFERENCES