

Impact of Self-Esteem on General Health Among Serving Indian Air Force Personnel and Air Veterans

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Abstract

Indian Air Force possesses the responsibility to safeguard the national airspace in conjunction with the other branches of the Armed Forces of the country. The country has witnessed the utmost dedication of Air Force personnel for safeguarding the nation since independence. Positive self-esteem is not only an indication of good mental health but also a contributing factor to overall psychological well-being and better health. In this study, the sample of 116 married personnel; 58 serving Air Force Personnel and 58 Air Veterans were randomly taken across the country. A convenient sampling method was used in this study. This study aims to examine the impact of self-esteem on general health among serving Indian Air Force personnel and Air Veterans. For this study the behaviour tools used were Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and General Health Questionnaire-12 questionnaires. SPSS-22 software was used for data management. Results of the study revealed that serving Air Force personnel showed prominence in both self-esteem and general health in comparison with Air Veterans. Mean comparison of the scores on these variables showed the difference. In the domain of self-esteem, a significant difference was observed at $p < 0.01$ level of significance and in the domain of general health, there was no significant difference between both the groups. The findings reflect that the work environment and culture of the Air Force make conducive to the general health and self-esteem of the participants. It is hoped that this is the first study in the context of the Indian Air Force.

Keywords: Self-esteem; General health; Indian Air Force; Air Veterans

1. INTRODUCTION

The human resources of the Indian Air Force (IAF) consist of combatants, non-combatants and civilians personnel. Combatant members further consist of commissioned officers and airmen cadre. Combatant members after retirement from service are termed as “Air Veterans”. In the present study, samples were taken only from the airmen cadre (serving and retired) of the IAF. IAF is one of the branches of the armed forces of India, which is the fourth largest Air Force in the world with highly skilled human resources and advanced technical equipment of global standards¹. IAF personnel has shown paramount devotion to the safety and security of the nation since independence. IAF is considered a credible air power and is known as the foremost professional service in the world. Positive self-esteem is not only an indication of good mental health but also a

contributing factor to overall psychological well-being and physical health. Involvement of positive self-esteem has been seen in influencing many domains of an individual's life such as satisfaction, achievements and ability to deal with disease etc. On the other hand, negative self-esteem results in the development of various mental disorders and social issues. As will be shown, how positive self-esteem is an indicator of good mental health in defence personnel. Self-rated health is found to be a spontaneous tool in determining one's health status. Thus, goals related to health could be achieved by self-rated health tools².

1.1 Self-Esteem

Self Esteem is poised of two terms 'self' and 'esteem'. Self is pointed towards one's self and esteem is derived from the Latin verb aestimare which means value. By

combining these two terms we can conclude self-esteem is value for one's self. It is the person's overall self-worth and attitude towards self. Self-esteem is the positive or negative evaluation of the self, as in how one feels about it³. Study⁴ reported a different perspective of self-esteem stating that it is the disposition of the person, which represents the judgment of his merit. Self-esteem has a prominent role in mental health and personality balance. This evaluation is believed to be relevant to the individual's optional adjustment and functioning. There are mainly two types of self-esteem: Low self-esteem and High self-esteem, which depend upon the situations, environment and people's surroundings. Low Self-esteem constructs a negative view of self; it is a condition when a person feels hopeless, incapable, incompetent, lack confidence in self, useless and unworthy. Low self-esteem is a trait of financially unsuccessful people, which in turn results in low risk-taking ability. On the other hand, high self-esteem constructs a positive view of self, there the person feels self-worthy, confident, competent, capable, happy, optimistic, far from worries and energetic

1.2 General Health

While defining health, numerous factors are taken into consideration. Mental, physical and social well-being are considered important factors in the definition of health, as per World Health Organisation (WHO)⁵. Cross-sectional studies have shown self-rated health to be related to the experience of physical symptoms⁶⁻⁷. In simple words, either improvement or decline might be expected in self-rated health. This might demonstrate ongoing changes in the magnitude of distress linked with physical bodily symptoms.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The beliefs and evaluations people hold about themselves are very crucial in determining who they are, what they can become and what they can do⁸. These beliefs and powerful evaluations by the people not only guide and nurture them throughout life but also govern their behaviour. Studies from the past have documented self-esteem as a crucial factor contributing to the quality of life and mental health⁹. Subjective well-being and self-esteem were found positively correlated and self-esteem contributes to significant

variance in an individual's mental health and happiness¹⁰. Higher self-esteem has indicated good mental health and low levels of depression among military personnel¹¹⁻¹². A positive significant correlation between general health and self-esteem among US Army soldiers was also reported in the study¹³. Lower self-esteem for some soldiers found reported as a result of mental health stigma, depression and anxiety^{12&14}. In a recent study¹⁵ in 2021 on South Korea Army soldiers, a negative correlation between self-esteem and depression level was reported. Study¹⁶ also confirmed a negative correlation between self-esteem and depression among soldiers. Higher self-esteem in soldiers resulted in better adaptation to military culture. In general, self-concept and self-esteem are nothing but people's understanding and feeling about themselves. These two factors play an important role in dealing with life's challenges, which are well recognised in works of literature with their possible impacts¹⁷⁻²¹. An effective and evaluative aspect of self-concept is self-esteem which is also equivalent to self-regard, self-estimation and self-worth²¹. An individual's global evaluation regarding one's positive or negative traits and values is referred to as Self-esteem. And based on this evaluation, an individual rank oneself in different aspects of life²²⁻²³. A study on military soldiers reveals a significant positive correlation of self-esteem with self-reported health, strength, endurance, self-efficacy and motivation²⁴.

3. OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

- To study the comparison of self-esteem between retired and serving Indian Air Force personnel.
- To study the comparison of general health between retired and serving Indian Air Force personnel.
- To study the relationship between self-esteem and general health among retired Indian Air Force personnel.
- To study the relationship between self-esteem and general health among serving Indian Air Force personnel.

4. HYPOTHESES

- There will be no difference in the level of self-esteem between retired and serving Indian Air Force personnel.

- There will be no difference in the level of general health between retired and serving Indian Air Force personnel.
- There will be no relationship between self-esteem and general health among retired Indian Air Force personnel.
- There will be no relationship between self-esteem and general health among serving Indian Air Force personnel.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Design

A correlational research design was used in the present study.

5.2 Sample

Data were collected from a total of 116 (58 serving and 58 veterans) Air Force personnel from Airmen Cadre only. Participants were belonging to different parts of India. A convenient sampling technique was used for data collection.

5.2.1 Inclusion Criteria

Data were collected only from serving and retired Air Force personnel between the age group of 35-45 years. All participants were married males from the Airmen cadre of the IAF.

5.2.2 Exclusion Criteria

Non-Air Force personnel were not included in the study. No individual below 35 or above 45 was considered for the study, as the age range was restricted to 35-45 years of age. Unmarried and female participants were also not considered for the study.

5.3 Tools

General Health Questionnaire-12 (GHQ-12) devised by Goldberg was used to assess general health and to identify the psychological distress of the participants. This is a four-point Likert tool having 12 items to evaluate general health. For example, items included "Have you recently been able to

enjoy your normal day-to-day activities?", "Have you recently been able to concentrate on whatever you're doing?," and "Have you recently been losing confidence in yourself?"

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) (Rosenberg, 1989) a self-report inventory having 10-items was used to assess overall self-esteem. Across large sample groups, inventory revealed good reliability and validity. It comprises statements related to overall feelings of self-worth. Each statement is answered on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Test-retest reliability and internal consistency of the RSES range from 0.82 to 0.85 and 0.77 to 0.88 respectively.

5.4 Procedure

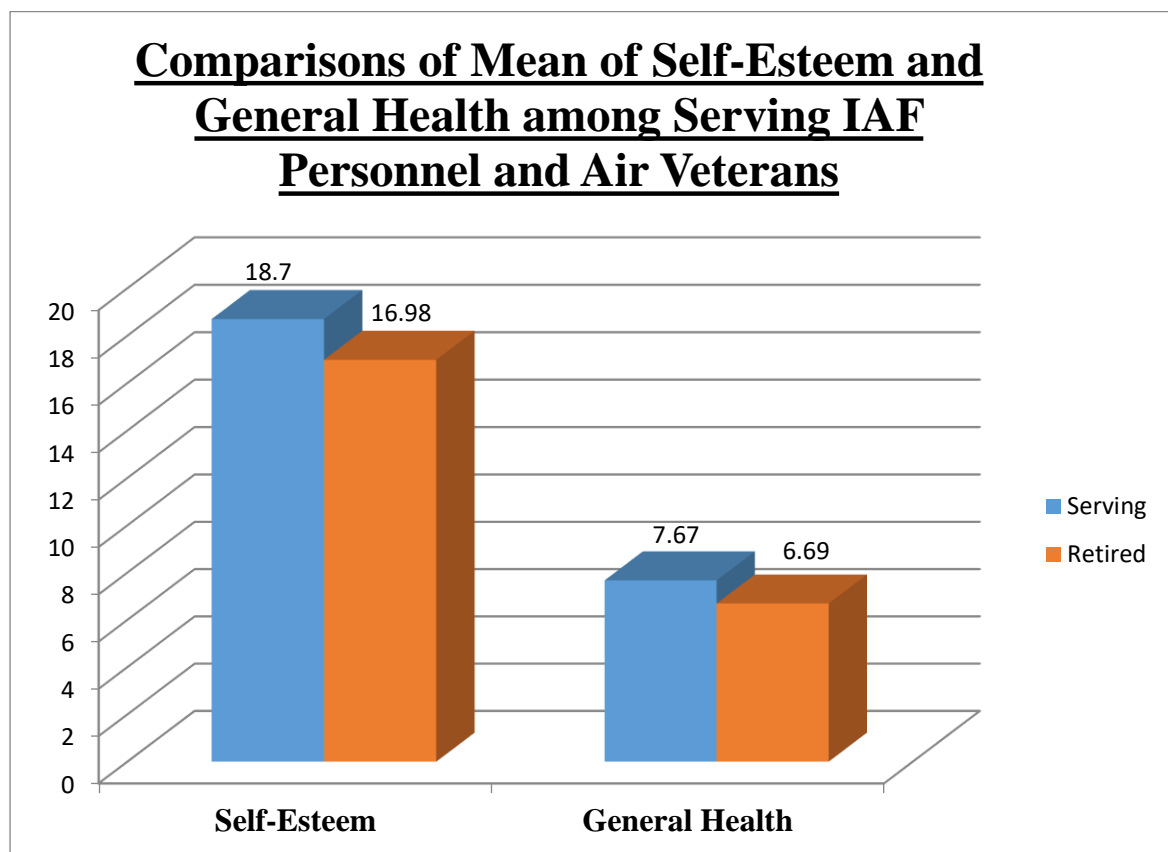
The research was done with serving Air Force personnel and Air Veterans. Participants between the specified age group were contacted personally and were informed about the aim of the research. Research tools selected for the study were administered to the participants.

5.5 Ethical Issues

Initially, a briefing was carried out to make the participants aware of the present study. They were ensured about the confidentiality of the data being provided by them. Informed consent of each participant was taken before the administration of the research questionnaires. They were informed that at no point their privacy will be invaded.

5.6 Statistical Analysis

Data collected were analysed using the SPSS-22 version. Descriptive and inferential statistics (mean, SD and t-ratio) were formulated and tabulated. Graphically representation for comparison of the mean of self-esteem and general health among serving IAF personnel and Air Veterans are shown in Figure-1:-

Figure-1 : Graphical Representation of Variables

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mean of serving IAF personnel on self-esteem (M=18.7) and general health

(M=7.67) was found higher than mean of Air Veterans on self-esteem (M=16.98) and general health (M=6.69) respectively.

Table: 1
Comparisons of mean and SD of Self-Esteem between Serving IAF personnel and Air Veterans

	Serving IAF Personnel		Air Veterans		t-Ratio	df	Significance Level
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Self Esteem	18.70	3.65	16.98	3.79	-2.49	114	0.01 level

From the results shown in Table-1 above, it has been found that serving personnel expressed better self-esteem in comparison with Air Veterans in the present study. This finding has been evidenced by their mean scores. The mean score of the serving personnel (M=18.70) was higher than the mean score of Air Veteran (M=16.98). (Refer Table 1). It was also revealed that serving personnel showed lesser variability of scores compared to Air Veterans, which has been reflected in their SD scores (Refer Table-1).

The t-value was found significant at $p < 0.01$ level of significance (refer to Table-1), which implies that the difference between the two means was statistically significant.

Serving personnel exerted higher self-esteem in comparison with Air Veterans. The present finding is very much in-line with previous research evidence (Rice, Butler & Marra, 2006). Health status, endurance, strength, self-efficacy and motivation are closely related to self-esteem. These characteristics are very much incorporating

with the lifestyle of serving personnel. Specific orientation in the Air Force for the service of the Nation gives intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to work. The culture of the defence service provides a conducive environment to facilitate self-esteem. Whereas, after leaving the service, people are deprived of that specific environment to

instigate themselves psychologically onto that level. Though, contrary shreds of evidence were also reported by previous researchers (Kim, 2021). In the present study, the work environment and professional culture facilitate self-esteem in a better way among the serving personnel.

Table: 2 <u>Comparisons of mean and SD of General Health between Serving IAF personnel and Air Veterans</u>							
	Air Veterans		Serving Air Force Personnel		t-Ratio	df	Significance Level
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
General Health	7.67	3.87	6.69	3.87	1.09	114	Not sig

In the domain of general health, a similar trend has been found. The participants from the serving population showed more prominence in general health as compared to participants of Air Veterans. It was reflected in their respective mean scores. The mean score of serving personnel was higher ($M=7.79$) than that of Air Veterans ($M=6.69$) (Refer Table-2). Both groups showed similar types of variability in scores (Refer Table-2). Since their t-value was not found significant, it can be stated that the difference between the two means was due to the chance factor.

Serving personnel showed more proficiency in general health as compared to Air Veterans. The present finding is similar to the previous research pieces of evidence (Boykin & Rice, 2013). The present finding may be due to the facilitating environment of physical and mental health, serving personnel showed more prominence in general health compared to Air Veterans. Since the difference was not found to be significant, it may be inferred that long experience with physical and mental health training of Air Veteran, when they were part of service.

Overall, it may be narrative that serving Air Force personnel showed higher self-esteem and general health as compared to Air Veterans. Higher self-esteem, as an indicator of general health, has been put forward by many researchers (Rohall et al., 2004). Impression of better self-esteem and general

health may be contributed to the environmental, cultural and professional aspects of Air Force service, which has been mirrored in the present study.

7. CONCLUSION

From the above results, it may be concluded that serving Air Force personnel showed prominence in both; self-esteem and general health as compared to Air Veterans. It can be inferred that the very nature of service and its other prospects lead the serving personnel in a higher place of general health and self-esteem compared to the persons retired from the service.

8. LIMITATION AND FUTURE DIRECTION

Some limitations have come across in the present study. Firstly, the sample size could be increased for better analysis. Secondly, the sample could also have included Air Force Officers Cadre, which would have given a holistic relationship among the variables under study. Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) may conduct a similar study among other wings of the Defence Forces i.e. Army and Navy to find a comprehensive picture of the relationship between the variables under study. To increase the precision of the findings, future research may include a greater number of participants from the three sister services (i.e. Army, Air Force and Navy).

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collection, analysing the results and manuscript writing.

Dr Sanjay Ghosh completed his PhD from the University of Calcutta. He is currently working as Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Phagwara (Punjab). In the current study, he was involved in data analysis and manuscript writing.

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