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Self-esteem in the Vietnamese adolescent: cross-cultural construction and validation of a tool

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Introduction

The purpose of the present study was to develop a measure of self-esteem for adolescents. This research is now being carried out in the framework of a sound cooperation project between the psychology faculties of the Hanoi University of Social Sciences and Humanities (Vietnam), the Hanoi Institute of Psychology (Vietnam), and the Universities of Toulouse II and Nîmes (France). It respects the specific cultural aspects and has now set as its priority goal the development of measurement tools firmly anchored in the particularities of Vietnamese culture, while benefiting from the advances made in the west in this area. The creation and validation of the Vietnamese Self-Esteem Scale (EVES – *Echelle Vietnamienne d'Estime de Soi*) is one of the fruits of this cooperation.

Method

This study proceeded in two-step method :

A cross-cultural adaptation of ETES (French scale) and thus created a new scale: EVES (Vietnamese Self-Esteem Scale)

A study to validate this new instrument by an analysis of the factorial structure of the scale and of its internal consistency on an initial population of 264 adolescents, and a test-retest on 161 adolescents.

Cross-cultural adaptation and construction of the Vietnamese Self-Esteem Scale (EVES)

The cross-cultural adaptation includes a literal translation in the Vietnamese language as well as a cultural adaptation to the Vietnamese context.

Scale :

The Toulouse Self-Esteem Scale (ETES - Oubrayrie *et al.*, 1994), is a self-report measure for older children and adolescents. ETES consists of 60 items, each of which is rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale.

Cross-cultural adaptation :

The cross-cultural adaptation includes a literal translation in the Vietnamese language as well as a cultural adaptation to the Vietnamese context. 4 phases : translation by qualified bilingual translators, backward translation, expert committee (child psychiatrist, psychologists and educationalist), testing.

Sample : 264 adolescents (mean age = 16.57). The target population was aged from 14 to 19 years, was at high school and lived in the Ha Tay district of Hanoi city. Of the 264 adolescents, 77 were boys.

Results

Scale structure :

Upon determining the existence of components, a PCA with varimax rotation was conducted. 15 items selected. 3 components.

Family Self measure family acceptance (e.g. "I am well-loved by my family").

Physical Self refer to the adolescents' physical appearance (e.g., "I think that I am well-built").

Social-Scholastic Self include in this component generally seemed to express satisfaction, or lack of satisfaction, with respect to academic skills (e.g., "I am easily discouraged by poor school results").

Pattern Coefficient :

I am well-loved by my family	.80		
I often feel unwanted in my family	.75		
I occupy an important place in my family	.74		
I think that my family would be better off without me	.74		
My family often think I am useless.	.72		
The people in my family do not think of me.	.70		
I would prefer to be a member of another family	.63		
I think that I am well-built.		.81	
I am proud of my body		.81	
I think that my body is growing well.		.68	
In general, people find my body and face agreeable to look at.		.51	
At school, I do not dare say when I do not understand.			.66
I am easily discouraged by poor school results .			.65
I feel clumsy and I do not know what to do with my hands.			.62
I feel lonely when I am in a group			.59

Internal Consistency Reliability :

The Cronbach coefficient alpha for the total scale score was .76

Cronbach coefficient alpha for each subscale

Dimension	n of items	Cronbach's α (n = 264)
Family Self	7	0.85
Social-Scholastic Self	4	0.52
Physical Self	4	0.68

Test-retest study :

In order to confirm the structure of the scale in 15 items, another "test" study of this new scale was carried out with 161 adolescents aged 14-19 (mean age = 16.29). Confirmatory analyses proves the stability of EVES' scale with a three-factor structure. We can consider the importance these dimensions take on during this period of life in the evaluation that the subject makes of him/herself and according to s/her different personal and social living contexts.

Conclusion : the Vietnamese Self-Esteem Scale (EVES) is short, simple, and easy to understand for the adolescent study group and is suitable for longitudinal use in adolescent clinical and developmental evaluation or in primary health care programs. Is a instrument to offer to the Vietnamese researcher and the Vietnamese clinician the twofold advantages of being both anchored in Vietnamese culture and of being a facilitator of international scientific exchanges. Its psychometric qualities make it a useful instrument because it evaluates a very important core aspect of the dynamics of the Vietnamese self : the three dimensions (family self, physical self, scholastic self) are indeed acknowledged as being highly important and of very great significance concerning adolescence. This Vietnamese instrument incorporates a richness of perspectives capable of giving an impetus to new studies and investigations that will provide an ever-fertile ground for scientific research.

Key-Words : Adolescent self-esteem ; Cross-cultural adaptation ; Validation ; Vietnam

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- Traditionally, self-esteem has been seen as a personality trait that is essential for psychological well-being. Over the last two decades it has generated an enormous amount of interest in the profession (psychologists, educators), and in the public on a broader level. This growing interest can be explained by the link that seems to exist between a low level of self-esteem and the great number of difficulties with which the youth of today are confronted, such as educational problems, delinquency, depression, suicide (Harter, 1998). A positive opinion of oneself promotes psychological stability (Harter, 1993; Oubrayrie, Lescarret, & de Léonardis, 1996), adaptation (Kaplan, 1980) and academic success (Pierrehumbert, 1991; Compas, 1991; Perron, 1997; Lescarret & al, 1998). A high level of self-esteem can function as a protective factor by increasing the endurance against the emergence of mental disorders (Garmezy, 1985 ; Rutter, 1987; Dumont & Provost, 1999). Therefore, for people working with children and adolescents, it is becoming increasingly important to have a better awareness of the subject's self-esteem and to understand the dynamics underlying the formation of this process in a developmental perspective.
- The concepts of the self change from one culture to another (Mashaba, 1996; Kareem & Littlewood, 2000; Dang, H.M., Tran, T.H., & Lescarret, 2005). Culture forms the different aspects of the self, the way in which people see themselves and according to the situation. Markus and Kitayama (1991) have shown that culture determines the way in which people define themselves, whether they see themselves as autonomous and separate from other people or inextricably entwined with others. The cultural differences in the concept of the self influence self-esteem (Yik & al, 1998; Heine & al, 1999; Wang & Ollendick, 2001). For example the members of Asian and western cultures diverge on the point from which they evaluate and promote positive feelings of the self. Because western cultures see the self as being separate from others, they encourage their members to manifest their uniqueness by engaging in self-improvement strategies, that is to say by presenting the self as being superior to others. As for Asian cultures such as the Chinese culture and the Vietnamese culture, the self is considered as being linked to others and people are encouraged to maintain interpersonal relations through self-effacement strategies, that is to say by presenting the self as being inferior to others. In other words if the people from western countries tend to see and present themselves positively, their counterparts from China or Vietnam tend to see and present themselves negatively (Heine & al, 1999). As a consequence, when an instrument for measuring self-esteem developed by Westerners is used, the level of Asians' self-esteem is lower than that of Westerners (Tsai & al, 2001; Farruffia & al, 2004 ; Chan, 2000). The self-esteem measuring tool is based on the cultural characteristics of western countries and does not appear to be relevant for the Vietnamese. However, in Vietnam, the self-esteem measuring instruments such as the Toulouse Self-Esteem Scale (Oubrayrie, & al, 1994), the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith, 1984), Culture-Free Self-Esteem (Battle, 1981), the Rosenberg scale (1965), the Harter scale (1982), etc. have been translated into Vietnamese and are increasingly being used in psychological practice in Vietnam. But, as we have already said, this translation does not guarantee the fact that the instrument has a cultural equivalence, which is why there is a great demand for the development of a self-esteem evaluation tool for the Vietnamese.
- Furthermore, Vietnam is currently a developing country and the adolescents in this country – like all those living in countries in the same situation – must face up to numerous trials directly linked to the amazing changes that the economy and social climate are going through. Confronted with new risks, these adolescents are vulnerable and it is essential that we should understand these adolescents' self-esteem if we are to accompany them better. The area of self-esteem is therefore a rapidly expanding research topic in the humanities.