

[Paper]

Self-Esteem and Other-awareness Perceptions in Adolescents and Adults with Mild Intellectual Disability in Japan.

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Abstract

In this study, we examined how individuals with intellectual disabilities perceive others, using specific measures. We developed scales to assess self-esteem and other-awareness in individuals with intellectual disabilities and examined their usefulness. We also assessed differences in scores on the self-esteem and other-awareness scales among individuals with intellectual disabilities in three age groups: adolescents (aged 15-24), adults (aged 25-39), and middle-aged (aged 40-59). The results showed no differences in self-esteem or other-awareness across developmental stages. Although the questionnaires had some limitations, an interview survey in which each question was read aloud was considered helpful. Using effective tools, it was possible to rate self-esteem and other-awareness on a scale of 4. Unlike a previous study with typically developing participants, individuals with intellectual disabilities did not show differences in self-esteem across age groups. This suggests that individuals with intellectual disabilities may experience fewer fluctuations in self-esteem during adolescence and may lack experience to cope with them. As it is challenging for children to gain a deeper understanding of themselves once they enter society, it is desirable for them to learn more about self-esteem and other-awareness within the context of career education in special support education. Further research is required to explore the relationship between self-concept and significant others in individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Keywords: Intellectual Disabilities, Self-Esteem, Other-Awareness, Adolescents, Adults

1. Introduction

Children describe themselves in relation to different things as they grow and develop cognitively and socially, from infancy to childhood (Damon & Hart, 1988; Montemayor & Eisen, 1977). Tomasello (1993) pointed out that when children engage in joint attention behavior, it indicates that they recognize and include themselves as individuals with similar intentions. In other words, once children gain awareness of other people, they view themselves as separate entities but similar to others (Kajita and Mizokami, 2012).

Mead (1934) referred to the subjective aspect of internal communication as “me,” and the part of the self that becomes apparent only after taking action as “I.” The function of “me” involves forming a sense of self and pertains to the organization of the community. In other words, others’ reactions to our actions shape our understanding of them. The accumulation of these experiences plays a crucial role in the development of an individual’s self-concept (Kanagawa, 2001). Both the individual’s perspective and the perspectives of others are important in self-concept formation (Bracken, 1996).

Psychologists have defined self-esteem in various ways. According to Rosenberg (1965), it refers to a positive or negative attitude toward oneself, whereas Zeigler-Hill (2013) defined it as the extent to which individuals view themselves favorably or perceive their capabilities. Leary and Downs (1995) introduced the sociometer theory, which suggests that self-esteem is affected by the acceptance of interpersonal relationships. This theory emphasizes the link between the self and others. In Japan, people tend to have low self-esteem in childhood and adolescence (Oshio et al. 2014). Japanese youths also exhibit lower self-satisfaction than their counterparts in countries such as Korea and the United States (Cabinet Office, 2019). This finding is supported by a study by Schmitt and Allik (2005), who used Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale to compare self-esteem scores across 53 countries; Japan ranked the lowest. Several researchers, including Chiu (1990), Lemétayer and Kraemer (2005), and Carroll et al. (1984), have investigated the impact of self-esteem on adolescents with intellectual disabilities and low learning abilities; however, their findings were inconclusive. Notably, research on self-esteem among individuals with mild intellectual disabilities in Japan is lacking, particularly in relation to emotional development.

Tsuji (1993) reported that individuals who paid attention to and showed concern for their own well-being were more likely to do the same for others. Tsuji (1993) observed that attention to the inner self encompassed subjective viewpoints and cognitive attitudes shared by the self and others, while attention to the outer self involved objective cognitive attitudes that were common to the self and others. Thus, individuals who have a strong "concern for the inner life of others" are more likely to intuitively recognize others' emotions through situational cues, whereas those with a strong "concern for the outer life" are more likely to recognize emotions through facial expressions. Additionally, individuals with a strong "imaginative concern" are more prone to using situational cues to fantasize and identify with fantasies. Toyota et al. (2008) using Tsuji's (1993) scale to measure other-awareness explored the relationship between external, internal, and imaginative awareness of others and emotional intelligence among university students. They found that internal awareness of others was strongly associated with emotional awareness and understanding. This implies that awareness of others may also shape an individual's self-concept. Several studies (Kojima & Notomi, 2013; Kooper et al., 2020) have highlighted how others significantly influence an individual's self-esteem. However, these studies focused solely on the direct influence of others' evaluations on self-esteem without considering the internalized perceptions of others' evaluations. In this study, we used specific measures to examine how individuals with intellectual disabilities perceive others.

Adolescence is a time of instability during which individuals form self-concepts, including their identity (Hall, 1904). However, as adulthood progresses, self-esteem tends to stabilize. People may experience fluctuations in self-esteem during adolescence because of certain events, but they mature and stabilize as they face these challenges (Harada, 2008). However, individuals with intellectual disabilities may face unique life events compared with neurotypical individuals, which could affect their self-esteem. Few studies have examined the self-esteem of individuals with intellectual disabilities during adolescence or adulthood. Furthermore, quality of life (QOL) and well-being are thought to be crucial for social interactions, and well-being and self-esteem are strongly correlated (Rosenberg et al., 1995). Research has shown that individuals with intellectual disabilities benefit from a perception regarding their QOL that is consistent with others in their environment (Jacinto et al., 2023). In Japan, Ito and Kodama (2005) revealed that self-esteem affected college students' subjective well-being. Kojima (2018) found that raising self-esteem in adolescent with autism spectrum conditions improved their well-being. Thus, self-esteem may be related to well-being and QOL in adolescents and adults with intellectual disabilities.

However, no study has examined self-esteem during both life-stages in Japan. Therefore, this study developed and administered self-esteem and other-awareness scales for individuals with intellectual disabilities aged between 15 and 60.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Seventy-nine individuals (32 men and 47 women) with mild intellectual disabilities were included in this study across three groups, adolescents ($n = 31$; 15–24 years), early adults ($n = 25$; 25–39 years), and middle-aged group ($n = 23$; 40–60 years). The mean age of the participants was 31.2 years ($SD = 12.8$ years; range: 15–60). Participants' IQ scores were provided by the school or facility in advance. Table 1 shows each group's average age and IQ scores.

2.2 Procedure

Individuals with mild intellectual disabilities were shown text and were read the study so that they could understand them. They were informed of the purpose and content of the study and were explained that they could stop responding to the interviews at any time. This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Institution to which the first author previous belongs. The interviews were administered in a quiet and secluded room. The interviews were unstructured. Furthermore, participants were assured that their confidentiality would be protected and their data would only be used for anonymous statistical analysis.

2.3 Measures

2.3.1 Self-esteem scale

Kojima and Notomi (2013) introduced a nine-item self-esteem scale, originally developed by Rosenberg (1965) and later translated into Japanese by Yamamoto, Matsui, and Yamanari (1982).

Table 1 1 Average age and IQ for each age group

	Age		IQ	
	Average	SD	Average	SD
Adolescent	17.3	1.5	58.9	7.9
Adult	31.6	5.0	47.9	10.9
Middle-aged	47.6	4.5	47.5	8.8

Table 2 Self-esteem questionnaire

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1. | I love myself. |
| 2. | I have many good qualities. |
| 3. | I am an important person. |
| 4. | I can do as many things as other people |
| 5. | I have many things to be proud of. |
| 6. | I can't do anything right. * |
| 7. | I think I am fine the way I am. |
| 8. | I think I am a bad person. * |
| 9. | I think I am a useful person. |

Table 3 Other-awareness scale for individuals with mild intellectual disability

1.	I try to pay attention to the actions and faces of others.
2.	I am always trying to read people's thoughts.
3.	I am always on the lookout for what people say and how they move.
4.	I find it easy to sense small changes in people's moods.
5.	I am careful to understand people's feelings.
6.	It is easy to look at a person's appearance.
7.	I am concerned about other people's clothes, makeup, and so on.
8.	I am interested in people's physical appearance and so on.
9.	I think a lot about people.
10.	I remember a lot of things about people.
11.	I often think about people this way and that.

Some negative expressions were modified into positive ones to make the questions easier for 4th to 6th graders (Kojima & Notomi, 2013). The items were read out for ease of understanding.

The scale consisted of a four-point rating scale accompanied by a "circle-and-x's" picture. For instance, a large circle represented "agree very much," while a small circle indicated "agree a little." Similarly, a small x indicated "disagree a little," and a large X denoted "disagree very much." Table 2 presents the self-esteem questionnaire, with items 6 and 8 as reversed items.

2.3.2 Other-awareness scale

Based on Tsuji (1993), this scale was modified for individuals with mild intellectual disabilities from a scale originally developed for university students. It comprises of 11 items, with a four-point response scale: "completely agree," "agree," "disagree," and "completely disagree." The items were read out for ease of understanding. The measure of other-awareness developed for people with mild intellectual disabilities is presented in Table 3.

3. Results

For the self-esteem scale, sixty-seven participants (mean chronological age [CA] = 30.0 years, SD = 12.5) were included in the analysis, excluding 12 participants who provided ambiguous answers. Cronbach's α coefficient was calculated to examine the internal consistency of items comprising the self-esteem scale; the overall questionnaire showed high internal consistency ($\alpha = .79$). To test for differences in the mean self-esteem scores of the three groups of people with mild intellectual disabilities (adolescent: $n = 25$; adult: $n = 25$; middle-aged: $n = 17$), a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) without correspondence was conducted with developmental stage as the independent variable and self-esteem scores as the dependent variable (Table 4). The results showed no statistically significant main effects.

Table 4 One-way ANOVA for self-esteem

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Self-esteem	0.81	2	0.41	1.45
Residuals	17.87	64	0.28	
Total	18.68	66		

For the other-awareness scale, sixty-one participants (mean CA = 29.5 years, SD = 12.8) were included in the analysis, excluding 18 who provided ambiguous answers (mean CA = 29.5 years, SD = 12.8). Cronbach's α coefficient was calculated to examine the internal consistency of the items comprising each other-awareness subscale; the overall scale had high internal consistency ($\alpha = .77$). The mean scores of the items corresponding to the three subscales of the other-awareness scale (M = 2.99, SD = 0.59) were: internal otherness subscale (M = 2.84, SD = 0.81), external otherness subscale (M = 2.84, SD = 0.81), and imaginary otherness subscale (M = 2.97, SD = 0.80). The alpha coefficients of the subscales were: $\alpha = .60$ for "internal otherness," $\alpha = .74$ for "external otherness," and $\alpha = .70$ for "imaginary otherness." The correlations among the other-awareness subscales are shown in Table 5; the three subscales showed significant positive correlations. To test for mean differences in the other-awareness scores among the three groups with mild intellectual disabilities, we conducted a one-way ANOVA with no correspondence, and with developmental stage as the independent variable and other-awareness scores as the dependent variable (Table 6). The results showed no statistically significant main effects.

4. Discussion

In this study, we developed scales to assess self-esteem and other-awareness in individuals with intellectual disabilities and examined their usefulness. We also assessed differences in scores on the self-esteem and other-awareness scales among individuals with intellectual disabilities in three age groups: adolescents (aged 15-24), adults (aged 25-39), and middle-aged (aged 40-59). The results showed no differences in self-esteem or other-awareness across developmental stages. Although the questionnaires had some limitations, an interview survey in which each question was read aloud was considered helpful. Using effective tools, it was possible to rate self-esteem and other-awareness on a four-point scale. Oshio et al. (1996) used a pictorial presentation to facilitate understanding while examining self-competence evaluation and social acceptance in children with intellectual disabilities and demonstrated the reliability of the scale.

Table 5 Correlations between other-awareness subscales

	Internal Otherness	External Otherness	Imaginary Otherness
Internal Otherness	—	0.36*	0.45*
External Otherness		—	0.31*
Imaginary Otherness			—

* $p < .01$

Table 6 One-way ANOVA for other-awareness

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Awareness of others	1.24	2	0.62	2.19
Residuals	16.38	58	0.28	
Total	17.62	60		

Unlike a previous study with neurotypical participants (Oshio et al., 2014), individuals with intellectual disabilities did not show differences in self-esteem across age groups. This suggests that individuals with intellectual disabilities may experience fewer fluctuations in self-esteem during adolescence and may lack the experience to cope with them. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology–Japan (2017) has been developing a seamless support system to ensure that people with disabilities have access to various educational and cultural opportunities throughout their lives after completing school. However, they may not have the opportunity to reflect deeply on and reidentify themselves. As it is challenging for children to gain a deeper understanding of themselves once they enter society, it is desirable for them to learn more about self- and other-awareness within the context of career education in special support education.

The fact that there was no difference in other-awareness scores across age groups suggests that the other-awareness scale can be widely used for adolescents and adults. Students' other-awareness may increase as they interact with people in society; however, those with intellectual disabilities have fewer opportunities to interact with diverse individuals during school and often limit close relationships to their parents and teachers (Lee et al., 2019). Educating students about diverse others is likely to lead to a search for future role models.

5. Conclusion

The self-esteem and other-awareness scales developed in this study were found to be beneficial for individuals with mild intellectual disabilities, regardless of age. This study also assessed the scales' usefulness and reliability. In future studies, it is important to consider these findings and prepare additional questions in advance. Further research is required to explore the relationship between self-concept and significant others in individuals with intellectual disabilities.

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