

Empathy and Motivation to Control Prejudiced Behaviour among College Students

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted on college students in India and its main objective was to find a relationship between Empathy and Motivation to Control Prejudiced Behaviour. The study also evaluated the gender differences in the study between males and females. The study was conducted on 122 students, out of which, 49.2% were female, 41% males, and 9.8% trans/non-binary. The tools used in this study was The Basic Empathy Scale in Adults (BES-A), by Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006, and Measure of Motivation to Control Prejudiced Behavior, by Dunton, B. C., & Fazio, R. H. (1997), and the tests were administered through online questionnaires. Most of the participants belonged to urban and semi-urban regions and came from middle-income groups. The results of the study found that there was a significant relationship between empathy and motivation to control prejudice. The study also showed that there was a gender difference in empathy and motivation to control prejudice as females were more empathetic and had higher motivation to control prejudice as opposed to their male counterparts. Trans/non-binary student data were excluded from this study. There were challenges faced while selecting an appropriate tool for this study as it hasn't been studied in the Indian context as much. The study implied that females were more empathetic and less likely to engage in prejudiced behaviors when compared to their male counterparts. Overall, the study was a great learning experience in the understanding of how an individual's emotional skill can be related to a negative social cognition in society.

Keywords: College students, Empathy, Motivation to Control Prejudiced Behaviour

In a country as socially diverse, and politically charged as India, empathy and peaceful coexistence become integral for an individual to navigate the issues in their country. With many intricate differences in socio, cultural, economic, linguistic, and regional positions, arises the susceptibility to develop and hold onto many prejudices. As young people that are newly experiencing autonomy, it is fascinating to find out more about the social schemas they let go and hold onto, in relationship with their basic empathy.

The early youth stage was one of the most important phases of life, being the formative period with major impacts on the future of a society as a whole. Students between the ages

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of 19-25 are at a stage of development in their lives, where they come across many changes, be it entering a whole new world of education through college and university or, being exposed to different kinds of novel challenges and situations and transcending into adulthood where they are at crossroads with their own values and autonomy.

This study was conducted on urban and semi-urban college students from the age group of 19-25 years of age. This includes students from various different streams currently enrolled in their degree and master's programs. The chosen age group was usually at a period when individuals form their own opinions with the influences from their respective environment. The college classroom seems an ideal setting and time for challenging preconceived views, promoting critical thinking, and instilling empathy.

In a study conducted by (Courtright et al., 2005), Weronika Bulska, Magdalena Bonk, Mariusz Seweryn & Krzysztof Krystain University Silesian Medical University, Poland, titled Empathy Among Physician, Medical Students, and Candidates in September 2015, it was found that Empathy is a trait that is rarely being enhanced in medical students during their education.

A study conducted by Younis Ahmad Sheikh discussed the various challenges faced by students pursuing higher education in India. (Sheikh, 2017) Lack of Equity, poor infrastructure, political interference, shortage of faculty, and inadequate opportunity for research are some of the few challenges faced by Indian students in higher education.

Empathy is understanding a person from their frame of reference, it involves vicariously experiencing that person's feelings, perceptions, and thoughts. Experiencing empathy does not, in itself, entail motivation to be of assistance.

Prejudice is a negative attitude toward another person or group formed in advance of any experience with that person or group. Prejudices include an affective component emotion that range from mild discomfort to hatred, a cognitive component assumptions and beliefs about groups, including stereotypes, and a behavioral component negative behavior, including discrimination and violence. Motivation to control prejudiced behaviors refers to the extent to which individuals refrain from acting in a prejudiced way.

(Olivier et al., 2019) Linda Olivier, Paula Sterkenburg, and Esmé van Rensburg from North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa conducted a study titled "The effect of a serious game on empathy and prejudice of psychology students towards persons with disabilities" in March 2019. The findings of the study contributed to the understanding of empathy as a dynamic component which doesn't exist in a vacuum, something that can be positively influenced even if in the short term, the empathy experienced may contribute to bridging the inequalities experienced by persons with disability.

Although outright violence against members of outgroups is fortunately rare, stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination nevertheless influence people's lives in a variety of ways. In most accounts, prejudice is the principal motivating force behind discrimination. Scholars have recognized, however, that discrimination can have non-prejudicial causes. (Quillian, 2006) emphasized that conformity to social norms can cause non-prejudiced persons to discriminate or prejudiced persons to refrain from discrimination. (Duckitt, 1992) reviews other situational factors that facilitate or inhibit discriminatory action.

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In a profound study titled *The Role of Empathy in the Relationship Between Social-Political Ideology and Sexual Prejudice in Heterosexual College Students in the U.S* by Marsden and Barnett, (2020), it was found that conservative social-political ideology was associated with higher levels of sexual prejudice.

Marginalized castes, communities, and women are under-represented in many of the top academic institutions in the country and ghettoized into certain sectors. ,(*India's Unequal University System*, n.d.) (Rukmini S., 2020) There have been numerous incidents of caste-based discrimination and suicides of Dalit students on campuses across the country. Students belonging to minority communities and marginalized groups have also been targeted and tortured while being on the premises of the college.

A consolidated article published by the wire in November 2017(*India's Universities Are Falling Terribly Short on Addressing Caste Discrimination*, n.d.), provides a peek into the different discrimination students from lower caste face at campuses in India. Information obtained through Right to Information applications revealed that many universities are yet to implement recommendations made by the University Grants Commission (UGC) to address caste-based discrimination.

Discrimination on campuses varies from physical exclusion to a more subtle denial of entitlements, and to seemingly neutral practices that disproportionately affect Dalit students. Several official bodies set up to investigate allegations of discrimination have found evidence of caste-based discrimination.

A systematic and elaborate study of campus climate can help provide more institutional support to marginalized students and policy reforms that foster a more inclusive and democratic ethos. (Pathania & Tierney, 2018) suggest several ways colleges and universities in India can begin the difficult work of better-integrating students from lower castes. Someone with a high level of empathy might be less likely to exhibit behaviors that are prejudiced. Self-reporting measures for prejudice and empathy also include the unique way in which a person sees themselves and their interactions with everyone else. People who experience empathy are more motivated to control prejudiced behaviors and actions as they might be worried about hurting others.

METHODOLOGY

The research design used here is Correlational design as the study focuses on finding a relationship between empathy and prejudice and how they influence each other.

Problem Statement

This study aims to find the relationship between empathy and prejudice among college students. This study also tries to establish the gender differences in the study. The study is conducted on college students from the age group 18-25, who were currently enrolled in masters or degree programs.

Operational Definition:

Empathy:

Empathy is an ability to feel an appropriate emotional response when one person is confronted with the mental state attributed to another person and understanding of another person's affective state.

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Motivation to control prejudiced behaviors:

A need to act in an unprejudiced manner while interacting with individuals different from them or belonging to an out-group.

Objectives:

- To establish a relationship between empathy and motivation to control prejudiced behaviors among college students.
- To establish the gender differences in the group for empathy.
- To establish the gender differences in the group for motivation to control prejudiced behaviours.

Hypotheses

H01: Students with high empathy are more likely to control prejudiced behaviors

H02: There are gender differences in the group in empathy

H03: There are gender differences in the group in motivation to control prejudice.

Universe of the Study

- Geographical area: Urban and Semi-Urban cities in India majorly including, Bangalore, Kochi, Trivandrum, and Mangalore.
- Sample Selection: The participants were selected based on their status as a student.
- Sampling Technique: Convenience sampling.
- Sample Distribution: The sample taken for the study includes undergraduates and postgraduate students doing their courses in any discipline. It consists of 122 students aged between 18-25 years. The study includes 49.2% females, 41% males and, 9.8% Trans/non-binary people.

● *Inclusion criteria:*

-Age range 18-25

-Graduates and Postgraduate students currently pursuing a course.

● *Exclusion criteria:*

-Participants who didn't meet the age requirement.

-Trans and Non-binary students.

Tools used for the study

● Empathy: The Basic Empathy Scale in Adults (BES-A), by Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006. This scale was developed in order to overcome the weaknesses of the IRI, Jolliffe, and Farrington (2006) developed the Basic Empathy Scale (BES), which focuses on two factors (i.e., cognitive and affective factors of empathy) and four basic emotions (i.e., anger, fear, happiness, and sadness).

Reliability: Internal consistency (alpha) estimates ranged from 0.79 to 0.85 (Jolliffe et al., 2006). Validity: Evidence-based on internal structure-Confirmatory factor analysis was used to support a two-factor structure. Consistent with prior research, there were significant differences between male and female scores on the BES (Jolliffe et al., 2006). It is a 20 item scale, which scores on 5 points Likert scale. There are items in the test that are scored reverse.

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● **Motivation to control Prejudice:** Measure of Motivation to Control Prejudiced Behavior, by Dunton, B. C., & Fazio, R. H. (1997). This scale sought out to understand whether it was an internalized personal process or appearing as prejudiced to others that affected the motivation to control prejudiced behaviors. Reliability: Reliability coefficients were adequate (>0.70) Validity: It is predictively valid. This scale has 17 items and it scored on 7 points Likert scale. It includes negative scoring.

Procedure

Questionnaires were administered to the participants online through Google forms Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the use of the data collected. They were also informed about their right to confidentiality and anonymity and that they could withdraw from the study at any given time. The completion time of the questionnaire was 20 minutes.

Statistical Techniques

The statistical technique used here is a correlation as the aim is to find the relation between the variables. An independent sample t-test was also used to determine the differences between gender.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 Significance of the relationship between empathy and motivation to control prejudice among college students

	N	M	SD	r	p
E	122	70.98	8.25	.370**	.001
MCP	122	1.95	10.71		

Note: E= Empathy, MCP= Motivation to control prejudice, N= Sample size, M=Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, r = Pearson Correlation Coefficient, *p<0.05, **p<0.01

Table 1 shows the significance of the relationship between empathy and motivation to control prejudice among college students. The Pearson correlation results show that the r-value is (r= .370) and the p-value is (p=.000, p<0.01), which means that there is a significant relationship between empathy and motivation to control prejudiced behavior among college students. Thus, proving the hypothesis(H01).

Table 2 Significance of difference in Empathy in females and males

	N	M	SD	t	df	p
F	60	72.80	8.93	3.01	108	.003
M	50	68.24	6.46			

Note: F=female, M=male, N= Sample size, M=Mean, SD= Standard Deviation df = Degree of Freedom, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, t=3.01

Table 2 shows the significance of the difference between Empathy in female students and male students. The sample size (N=122) out of which, females were (N=60), and males (N=50). This mean value for empathy in females was (M=72.800) and for males were (M=68.2400). In terms of Standard deviation, it was (SD=8.93631) for females and

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(SD=68.2400) for males. To find the statistical significance of the difference between the two means, a t-test was conducted and the t value was obtained. The t-value was ($t=3.010$) and the p-value was found out to be ($p=.003, p<0.01$), which means that there is a significant difference between males and females in empathy. Therefore, the hypothesis is proved. (H02)

Table 3 Significance of difference in Motivation to control prejudice in females and males

	N	M	SD	t	df	p
F	60	4.40	10.59	2.66	108	.009
M	50	.92	10.21			

Note: F=female, M=male, N= Sample size, M=Mean, SD= Standard Deviation df = Degree of Freedom, * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, $t=2.66$

Table 3 shows the significance of the difference between Motivation to control Prejudice in female students and male students. The sample size ($N=122$) out of which, females were ($N=60$), and males ($N=50$). This mean value for Motivation to control prejudice in females was ($M=4.4000$) and for males was ($M=-.9200$). In terms of Standard deviation, it was ($SD=10.59453$) for females and ($SD=10.21571$) for males. To find the statistical significance of the difference between the two means, a t-test was conducted and the t value was obtained. The t-value was ($t=2.665$) and the p-value was found out to be ($p=.009, p<0.01$), which means that there is a significant difference between males and females in motivation to control prejudice. Therefore, hypothesis is proved(H03).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between empathy and an individual's motivation to control prejudice and understand if the variables had any influence on each other. The participants of this study were students from the age group of 19-25, and 36.8% of them were from a social science academic background, and 77% of them were from a middle-income socio-economic background and 42.6% were from the general caste category. 18% of the students were from OBC/ST/SC/Dalit/Adivasi Category, with 7.4 % of the population belonged to minority religions. 30% of the students identified as religious, 26% identified as spiritual, and 23% of them identified as atheists.

Referring to Table 1, the relationship between empathy and motivation to control prejudice can be studied. Based on the table it can be understood that there is a significant correlation between the two factors. Students with high empathy are more likely to control their prejudiced behaviors as an extension of their empathetic nature; they also don't engage in prejudiced behaviors. The study found that there is a significant moderate positive correlation between empathy and a person's motivation to control prejudiced behaviors, which means that a person with high empathy is less likely to engage in prejudiced behaviors as suggested by the hypothesis of the study (H01) quite unlike the results of a study by Linda Olivier, Paula Sterkenburg, 'The effect of a serious game on empathy and prejudice of psychology students towards persons with disabilities' which showed that the students had a moderate level of empathy and high prejudice despite intervention.

Referring to Table 2, the significant differences between females and males in empathy can be studied. The table shows that there is a difference between the two genders, with females having higher empathy than males. In a study conducted by Leonardo Christov-Moore &

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Marco Iacoboni (Christov-Moore & Iacoboni, 2019) titled, Sex differences in somatomotor representations of others' pain: a permutation-based analysis, it was observed that female participants in the study showed relatively higher activation in a sensory area of the brain associated with pain than their male counterparts. A biological explanation for the gender differences is suggested by this study that shows that localized internal somatomotor representations of others' pain, a functional index of bottom-up resonance processes, are stronger in female subjects.

Similar results were found in a study by Agnieszka Bratek, Weronika Bulska, titled Empathy Among Physicians, Medical Students, and Candidates in September 2015. Referring to table 3, the significant differences between males and females in motivation to control prejudice can be studied. The study also found a significant gender difference in motivation to control prejudice, female students had higher motivation to control prejudiced behaviors than male students. Although prejudice may not be an absolutely gendered behavior, the psychological literature presented in Nerisa Dozo's meta-analysis study titled Gender Differences in Prejudice: A biological and social-psychological analysis, from the University of Queensland 2015, demonstrates that men display more prejudice than women (Dozo, 2015). From the responses collected by the subject, it was observed that 11 female respondents, and 4 trans/non-binary respondents, and 1 male respondent scored above 80 in empathy. Trans/non-binary participants scored a mean of 74.91 in empathy and motivation to control prejudice score of 0.91. Overall, the group had a mean empathy score of 70.983 and a motivation to control prejudice score of 1.9590, which is considered as high empathy and moderate prejudice respectively. However, these findings can't be generalized unless tested on bigger sample size.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

The primary objective of this study was to determine the relationship between empathy and motivation to control prejudice. In the light of increased prejudiced behaviors in the country and a general decline in empathy among millennials, it felt essential to find out how college students, who constitute more than 60% of the Indian population, are doing. The study found that empathy levels and motivation to control prejudice were significantly related. The students had a moderate amount of prejudice and high empathy on average. The study established some gender differences in empathy and motivation to control prejudice. It showed that females were more empathetic and less likely to engage in prejudiced behaviors when compared to their male counterparts. The study implies that males are more likely to engage in prejudiced behaviors. The gender differences in empathy is also a matter of concern and we must further evaluate how males can be conditioned to develop more empathy.

There are limitations to this study. A bigger sample would have helped much better in gaining understanding. The study fails to establish the reasons for the interrelationship between empathy and motivation to control prejudiced behaviours, as well as explain the gender differences in the same.

The Measure of Motivation to Control Prejudiced Behavior, by Dunton, B. C., & Fazio, R. H. (1997) tool was not tailored for the unique political history and diversity of India, and a more fitting tool would have helped the respondents respond in a more serious and personal manner.

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In the case of statistical techniques, the research has only used correlation analysis and t-test to study the relationship between Empathy and Motivation to control prejudice among college students. Hence the results of the study may carry some limitations due to the limited techniques used.

There are very few studies done on the same variables in the Indian context, communalism, caste-based discrimination and other forms of prejudice need to be discussed more in the academic front with respect to how the human psyche functions. A lot of studies provide evidence that contact with the out-group will reduce prejudice levels, it is not just enough to determine these levels of prejudice but also to come up with means by which prejudice can be reduced.

A cross-cultural study would help understand how empathy levels affect motivation to control prejudiced behaviors in different parts of the country.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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