

Comparative Study

A Comparative Study on Resilience, Stress and Aspirations among Aspirants and Non-Aspirants

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ABSTRACT

India is the 2nd highest populous country with the world's 3rd largest education system, but the job opportunities provided massively require changes both in qualitatively and quantitatively. Every 5 out of 100 Indians decide to serve their nation by joining the Armed Forces or The Civil Services and about 20,000 - 11,00,000 students are assessed each year, only 200 -1500 of whom are selected. These exams can prove to be highly stressful; this stress can be explained as any physical or emotional strain caused by any type of change in the environment of an individual. For e.g.: Stress in a person could be the pressure for a potential test. These aspiring students are assessed on their ability to grow and thrive in the face of challenges and bounce back from adversity as these services hold many unpredictable situations. For e.g.: Overcoming the death of a dear colleague in line of action. Not only this but plenty of candidates do not give up until they meet their target of achieving what they aspire to be and apply for these assessments repeatedly which shows how high spirited and determined they are. Because of their high strength of character and hardiness towards their goals they are all extremely aspiring and work hard to fulfill their expectations and goals. Aspiration could stand for a purpose, an aim or any ultimate goal that can be accomplished through personal efforts. The ones who thereafter are selected in the process are extremely stressful, durable, and highly aspiring candidates. This study analyzes the level of pressure, endurance, and expectations of the aspirants in relation to non-aspirants. A common measuring tool has been used to test their levels of tension, endurance, and expectations. The results depicted a significant difference in stress, resilience and career aspirations among aspirants and non-aspirants. With a notion of belief that aspirants are more stressful than non-aspirants, the study reveals some contradicting results showing that aspirants are in fact less stressful than non-aspirants.

Keywords: Aspirants, Non-Aspirants, Exams, Stress, Resilience, Aspirations

“While being grilled always hurts, an important survival mechanism I’ve acquired over the years is to both thrive on rejections and hold onto compliments. Rejection enrages me, but that “I’ll show you!” feeling is an extremely powerful motivator. I am at a point where I am afraid that if I lose it, I will stop working. On the flip side, there is nothing like a meaningful compliment from someone you respect.” – Matthew Weiner.

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Whilst the material comforts are high on the agenda of a young man, Indian youth strive to thrive, there are also numerous other intangibles that cause a surge of dedication and fire up a person's passion for success, in this case, for example, it could be an adventurous life, a secure government job, love for uniform etc.

These aspiring candidates undergo intensive coaching courses and regular competitive test series before appearing for any of these exams. At present, a written examination evaluates the candidates' academic abilities first by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC). Contenders who successfully pass written exams, appear before an interview where a variety of personality assessments and other tests are administered to applicants, and are eventually recommended by the board to be chosen. The Civil Services and the SSB interview seek ultimately to ensure that the candidate is qualitatively competent, and capable of handling.

During their coaching, they experience massive stress all year round. A rarity of factors could contribute to their stress, such as cut-throat competition, depleted resources, volatile competitive exams as well as insufficient support from the family. All these kinds of stressors can interfere with daily life. Although some stress can be helpful, but unrequired stress can lead to poor test performance of individuals.

In creating self-determination, aspirations for the future play an important role with developing adulthood as a time where each ambition is explored in real life. Career ambitions increase a desire for success, they are ways of support in accomplishing future work objectives. Studies have shown that an individual's success is linked favorably to self-concept and career goals. According to Sewell, Haller, and Portes (1969) career aspirations serve as a driving force of potential action when associated with a degree of overt behaviors and the craving for personal achievement which further leads them to stay motivated and perform better. Aspirants with high career aspirations have a growth mindset. They believe in the incremental or marginal development they can bring with their hard work. Candidates who have this kind of a mindset are more likely to measure up to the arduous criteria of this evaluation.

Some of these candidates know how to learn from and surpass their shortcomings. This is an extremely critical assessment of consistency. There are applicants who do not give up their ambition and continue to accomplish their target even despite undertaking numerous attempts.

The Armed Forces and the Indian Civil Services are India's backbone, with immense reverence and obligations. Officers to join these organizations are the country's brightest minds. They become officials who in future stand responsible for the management of the country's physical, natural, and human capital. They are people from diverse lifestyles and educational and social backgrounds who display honesty, vision, and loyalty to the country. The grueling and painstaking path towards accomplishment of these goal demands utmost commitment, encouragement, inspiration, strength to resolve setbacks while remaining consistent with the aim.

Stress

Hans Selye M.D. considered by many to be the founder of stress science, started researching the phenomenon of stress about 50 years ago. His classic and still highly regarded book, "The Stress of Life" first published in 1946, handed us with this definition: A non-specific

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reaction of the body to a demand. Stress is any change, positive or negative, required as a response from our bodies to adapt and bring us back to our relatively peaceful state.

He said stress is a spice of life and the lack of stress is death, suggesting that stress is imminent. However, in his study Selye cleared that not all stress is unpleasant. He distinguished between pleasant stress and unpleasant stress and labelled them as eustress and distress, respectively.

Stressors come in two types, like stress itself, Distresses and Eustresses. A chance to show up for a meeting and present might be frightening or endangering for one, however a second person might have anticipated or wished to be called upon to look recognized and knowledgeable. The former considers the situation as a distress, the latter as an opportunity (eustress) or a constructive challenge.

Stress is constitutional and our bodies are well suited to cope with some rational tensions of our lives.

Resilience

Despite the construct being operationalized in a variety of ways, most definitions are based around two core concepts: adversity and positive adaptation.

There is a slight variation in the use of the term resilience: According to Ruiz-Casares et al., resilience is a dynamic process involving the interaction between risk and compensatory factors over the lifespan.

The most common definition of resilience in the recent years has been, “positive adaptation despite adversity” which was introduced by Luthar and colleagues. Luthar has called resilience a construct with two distinct dimensions: significant adversity and positive adaptation which means resilience is never measured directly from this angle, but it is partially obtained from the proof of these dimensions. Other researchers support this notion of a two-part construction (Masten, 2001; Yates et al., 2003; Sroufe et al., 2005). In this sense, the existence of a strong danger or adversity demands resilience, which separates resilience from normal or normative development (Luthar and Chichetti, 2000; Rutter, 1999; 2000; 2005).

Life cannot be mapped, but everyone will undergo changes from daily struggles to longer enduring stressful events such as a loved one's death, a life-changing tragedy, a significant illness or could even be a rejection. Considering the response to the same psychological stressor can vary immensely from person to person, resilience is considered an individual trait, all transitions have a different effect on everyone and a unique flux of perception, intense feelings, and confusion.

Career Aspirations

Career aspiration is defined as the “degree of commitment to a given career” (Gray & O'Brien, 2007, p. 318), a strong career orientation, and the extent to which people aspire to leadership positions and continued education within their career (Gray & O'Brien, 2007). According to a study high aspiration in a person is a basic component of his/her self-image.

In a research Gutek and Larwood (1987) defined a career as “a series of related jobs within an organization or different jobs within various companies”. The growth of the profession is

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dependent on the number of positions that a person holds and should represent advancement, be it through higher appreciation or compensation, or through respect from colleagues. The further that a person advances in this direction, the more successful he or she is. (Gutek & Larwood). Career aspirations represent an individual's orientation toward a desired career goal under ideal conditions. More simply stated, career aspirations "provide information about an individual's interests and hopes, unfettered by reality" (Hellenga, Aber, & Rhodes, 2002, p. 200; Rojewski, 1996).

An appreciation for individuals and organizations of the developmental essence of ambitions and its effects on career decisions is significant. Persons must be willing, before engagement in activities which lead to a decision, to decide the outcomes of a career choice. The success and loss encounters of different tasks allow people to step towards or away from clear targets. Individual supportive structures, including supporting a person's career goals through a boss and motivating them to consider acceptable advancement work, will enable people to better crystallize their career aspirations. A clear understanding of one's goals leads to healthier career choices.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to test stress, resilience & aspirations among aspirants and non-aspirants preparing for civil services and armed force exam.

Hypothesis: The resilience, career aspirations and stress should be comparatively high among Aspirants than non-aspirants.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The study was conducted on 75 Aspirants and non-aspirants from around the territory of Delhi and states of Haryana, Punjab, and Himachal Pradesh. The sample lied in the age group of 18-27.

Instruments

- **Career Aspiration Scale:** The revised version of the career aspiration scale developed by Gregor and O'Brien (2016) was used to measure the career aspirations of aspirants. This scale consists of 24 items, divided into three sections: aspiration for achievement, aspiration for education and aspiration for leadership. The candidates responded on a five-point scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). The scores are reversed for the five (2, 4, 12, 20, 22) positively mentioned items.
- **CDRISC- 25:** The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale is a questionnaire that tests how well one is prepared to bounce back after traumatic incidents, disaster, or trauma. The original scales were considered inadequate. It is a self-administered scale containing 25 items that exhibit good psychometric properties with each item rated on a five-point scale of responses from "not true at all" (0) to "true nearly all of the time" (4).
- **Perceived Stress Scale:** This is one of the most widely used scales. It is the measure of the degree to which circumstances in one's life is volatile, uncontrollable, and overburdened on a 5-point Likert scale in the last month (0 = never, 1 = almost never, 2 = often, 3 = fairly often, 4 = very often) is recorded by respondents. The scores are reversed for the four items that are positively mentioned (4, 5, 7, 8).

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Procedure

The Participants were made aware about the purpose of the research and were assured of the confidentiality of the information to elicit sincere responses without any apprehension or inhibitions. Responses were collected using google form, after which respondents were acknowledged for their cooperation and assistance.

RESULTS

Table 1 – Shows the correlation matrix between the variables.

Correlation Matrix

	Perceived stress	Resilience	Leadership aspiration	Achievement Aspiration	Educational Aspiration
Perceived stress	—				
Resilience	-0.573***	—			
Leadership aspiration	-0.590***	0.671	—		
Achievement Aspiration	-0.590***	0.643***	0.844***	—	
Educational Aspiration	-0.563***	0.696***	0.810***	0.800***	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 2 – Shows T-test of aspirants & non-aspirants.

	Group	N	Mean	SD	t-statistic	df	p
Stress	Aspirants (A)	75	14.0	5.83	-11.6	148	<.001
	Non-Aspirants (NA)	75	23.8	4.50			
Resilience	Aspirants (A)	75	86.6	10.55	16.2	148	<.001
	Non-Aspirants (NA)	75	56.7	12.00			
LA	Aspirants (A)	75	29.7	3.29	19.0	148	<.001
	Non-Aspirants (NA)	75	18.2	4.11			
AA	Aspirants (A)	75	29.4	2.77	18.0	148	<.001
	Non-Aspirants (NA)	75	18.1	4.70			
EA	Aspirants (A)	75	29.9	3.30	22.3	148	<.001
	Non-Aspirants (NA)	75	18.8	2.79			

DISCUSSION

The results found out that there is a negative correlation between resilience & perceived stress ($r=-0.573$, $p<.001$). The results also showed that there is a negative correlation between leadership aspiration & stress ($r=0.590$, $p<.001$) but leadership aspiration is positively correlated to resilience ($r=0.671$, $p<.001$). Achievement aspirations are negatively correlated to the perceived stress ($r= -0.590$, $p<.001$) but positively correlated to resilience ($r=0.643$, $p<.001$). and leadership aspiration. Educational aspiration is also negatively correlated to perceived stress.

($r=-0.563$, $p<.001$) but positively correlated ($r=0.696$, $p<.001$) to Resilience, leadership aspiration ($r=0.810$, $p<.001$) and achievement aspiration ($r=0.800$, $p<.001$).

According to a multitude of reports, resilient individuals show stronger coping mechanisms and thus their stress levels are substantially low. Furthermore, studies reveal that individuals

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high on aspirations are positively associated with effort exertion which negatively associates to stress but has a positive bearing on resilience.

The results found out that non-aspirants [NA ($t = 23.8$)] are higher on stress as compared to aspirants. Furthermore, it has been found that aspirants [A ($t = 86.6$)] are higher on resilience as compared to non-aspirants, Leadership aspiration [A ($t=29.7$)], achievement aspiration [A ($t=29.4$)] and educational aspiration [A ($t=29.9$)] has also been observed to be higher in aspirants as compared to non-aspirants.

Sometimes, constant exposure to adverse demanding conditions can have negative implications on the physical and mental well-being of these candidates, however, according to a multitude of reports, the stress levels among such applicants are comparatively low because of the psychological resources that leadership affords. A psychological resource that has a proven influence on stress is keeping a leadership position that increases the sense of balance. The regulation of a stressor, for example, changes its physiological effect and decreases cortisol production. Likewise, people who feel they have control over their lives appear to have lower levels of cortisol. This means that people with low stress levels are especially ideal for leadership and thus must be selected for leadership roles.

CONCLUSION

Every aspirant experience stress in their life but chronic stress can interfere with the quality of life and hinder with their test performance. The purpose of the study was to study the correlation between stress, resilience, and career aspirations in aspirants compared to non – aspirants. It was hypothesized that aspirants could be reasonably high in these areas as compared to non-aspirants. The study was conducted on 75 aspirants and non-aspirants each. The standardized measures of stress, resilience, and career aspirations were administered on participants through google forms. The results revealed a significant negative correlation between stress and resilience but a positive correlation between resilience and aspirations. The study results are somewhat contradictory but radiate a ray of light on how an attribute of leadership can be a reason for low levels of stress. Essential qualities are required for the development of leadership skills because effective leadership transforms people's goals and ambitions, even their identities, and replaces self-oriented behavior with group-oriented behavior.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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