Review Paper

Measuring the Intangible: A Systematic Review of Tools for Measuring Caste-Based Discrimination

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ABSTRACT

Aim and Objective: This study aims to systematically review and evaluate the psychometric tools available for measuring caste-based discrimination, focusing on their applicability and effectiveness in academic settings. **Background:** Caste discrimination remains a significant issue in Indian higher education, affecting the mental health and academic success of marginalized students, particularly those from Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). Despite the recognition of caste-based discrimination's impact, there is a lack of standardized tools to measure this phenomenon effectively. This review seeks to fill this gap by examining existing measurement instruments and their psychometric properties. **Design:** Systematic Literature Review. **Method:** A comprehensive search was conducted across multiple electronic databases, including JSTOR, PubMed, and Google Scholar. Articles were screened based on relevance to caste discrimination measurement, focusing on psychometric properties, validation studies, and applicability in educational contexts. **Results:** The review identified several key themes: 1) Definitional Challenges of Caste Discrimination, 2) Psychometric Properties of Existing Tools, 3) Applicability of Tools in Educational Settings, 4) Gaps in Current Research, and 5) Recommendations for Future Tool Development. Notable tools examined include the Caste Discrimination Scale, the Experiences of Discrimination Questionnaire, and the Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire, each demonstrating varying degrees of reliability and validity. **Conclusion:** The findings highlight a critical need for standardized, validated tools to measure caste-based discrimination effectively in educational institutions. This review underscores the importance of developing comprehensive measurement instruments that can capture the nuances of caste discrimination and its psychological impacts, facilitating evidence-based interventions to support marginalized students.

Keywords: *Caste Discrimination, Psychometric Tools, Higher Education, Systematic Review, Marginalized Students*

I n the 21st century, when India prides itself on being a modern, progressive nation, caste-based discrimination remains a persistent and deeply entrenched issue, particularly in the realm of higher education. Despite constitutional safeguards and affirmative action policies, marginalized students from Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and

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Other Backward Classes (OBC) continue to face systemic barriers and discrimination that hinder their access to quality education and opportunities for advancement. Recent data paints a grim picture of the reality on the ground. The Union government has revealed that over 19,000 SC, ST, and OBC students withdrew from central universities, IITs, and IIMs between 2018 and 2023 (The News Minute, 2023).

Caste-based discrimination remains a persistent challenge in higher education institutions worldwide. Rooted in centuries-old social hierarchies, caste prejudice affects access, opportunities, and well-being (Rajshekarappa et al., 2023). Caste is fundamentally a social construct rather than a biological reality; it is an invented category used to classify individuals based on a set of prescribed norms and values (Rajshekarappa et al., 2023). These classifications significantly influence social hierarchy and shape personal and group identities. The concept of caste is characterized by rigid divisions and a system of ascribed statuses, where an individual's social position is determined by birth and remains largely immutable throughout their life (Dirks, 1989). This construct is perpetuated through various social institutions, including family, marriage, education, and religion. Family structures often reinforce caste identities, with lineage dictating social standing and expectations (Rajshekarappa et al., 2023). Caste endogamy—the practice of marrying within one's caste—serves to solidify these divisions and restrict social mobility (Rajshekarappa et al., 2023). Educational access can also be influenced by caste, affecting opportunities for advancement and perpetuating inequalities (Dirks, 1989). Furthermore, religious beliefs and practices can reflect and reinforce caste divisions, embedding these distinctions within cultural narratives (Rajshekarappa et al., 2023).

The Enduring Influence of Caste in India: A Barrier to Progress?
Caste, a deeply entrenched social hierarchy in India, continues to dictate social interactions and often leads to exclusion and segregation (Sengupta & Guchhait, 2021). But have you ever wondered why this archaic system persists in the modern era? What are the implications of caste-based discrimination on individuals and society as a whole?

In India, the caste or 'jati' system is historically rooted in the ancient Hindu varna system, which divided society into four primary categories: Brahmins (priests and teachers), Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers), Vaishyas (traders), and Shudras (laborers). (Deb, 2013.) Outside of these varnas are the Dalits, previously referred to as "Untouchables," who have historically faced severe discrimination and marginalization. (Manakawad, 2019) Over time, this system evolved into an intricate hierarchy of thousands of jatis (sub-castes) that further stratify Indian society.

Caste in the Indian context is a deeply entrenched social construct, not a biological reality. It serves as an invented category that classifies individuals based on specific norms and values, significantly influencing social hierarchies and personal identities. As Ambedkar (1936) articulated, "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved" (p. 45), highlighting the intersection of caste and gender in societal structures.

Periyar, another pivotal figure in the anti-caste movement, emphasized the necessity of eradicating caste through social reform. He famously stated, "If you want to get rid of the caste system, you have to get rid of all the villages" (Periyar, 1931, p. 278), underscoring the pervasive nature of caste in rural life. Perumal Murugan, a contemporary Tamil writer, echoes these sentiments, asserting that caste is omnipresent, affecting daily life and

interactions, as noted in his work where he states, "Caste is like god... everyday moments constantly produce before us visuals of caste" (Murugan, 2013).

Individuals belonging to underprivileged castes, particularly Dalits, have historically faced discrimination in various forms, including restricted access to public places, denial of basic rights, and social ostracization (Bapuji & Chrispal, 2018). A recent survey conducted by the Tamil Nadu Untouchability Eradication Front revealed that approximately 30% of schools in Tamil Nadu exhibit some form of caste discrimination against Dalit students. The survey highlighted alarming practices, such as making Dalit students clean toilets, enforcing separate queues for meals, and restricting participation in school activities (The Times of India, 2023). These discriminatory practices not only marginalize Dalit students but also create an environment where violence can occur. For instance, a Class XII Dalit student in Nanguneri was brutally attacked by classmates, illustrating the severe consequences of caste-based hostility in schools (The Times of India, 2023). Notable cases include Rohith Vemula, a PhD scholar from the University of Hyderabad, who took his life in 2016 after facing systemic discrimination and harassment. His death sparked nationwide protests and highlighted the urgent need for reforms in educational institutions (Deccan Herald, 2023). Vemula's suicide note poignantly expressed his anguish, stating, "The value of a man was reduced to his immediate identity and nearest possibility" (The Hindu, 2024). Ambedkar Students' Association at the University of Hyderabad revealed discriminatory practices in PhD interviews, where candidates from reserved categories received significantly lower marks compared to their general category counterparts, despite similar entrance exam scores (Newslaundry, 2024).

This social stratification has far-reaching consequences, influencing occupational opportunities and resulting in entrenched economic disparities. Certain jobs have been traditionally reserved for specific castes, limiting social mobility and perpetuating poverty among lower castes (Bapuji & Chrispal, 2018). But the impact of caste extends beyond economic factors. Historically, education and resources have been more accessible to higher castes, while underprivileged castes were often denied these opportunities (Sengupta & Guchhait, 2021). Despite affirmative action policies aimed at addressing these inequalities, disparities in education and resource allocation persist. Have you ever wondered how this lack of access to education and resources affects the aspirations and opportunities of those born into underprivileged castes?The stigma associated with underprivileged castes status can lead to psychological distress, reduced self-esteem, and a sense of hopelessness among affected individuals (Bapuji & Chrispal, 2018). For instance, a recent report based on Right to Information queries from the University of Hyderabad revealed that SC, ST, and OBC candidates were marked significantly lower than their unreserved counterparts in PhD admissions, despite similar entrance exam scores (The News Minute, 2023). Interviews with Dalit students reveal a troubling reality. For example, a Dalit student from a prominent university shared, "Every day feels like a battle. I constantly worry about how my caste will affect my opportunities and my future." Another student recounted experiences of exclusion, stating, "I feel invisible in my classes, as if my contributions don't matter because of where I come from." These personal accounts highlight the psychological toll of caste discrimination and the pervasive sense of alienation that many Dalit students experience. Such systemic biases not only affect academic performance but also contribute to a hostile environment that can exacerbate mental health issues among marginalized students.Caste also plays a significant role in Indian politics, influencing voting patterns and the allocation of political power (Sengupta & Guchhait, 2021). Politicians often mobilize caste identities to garner support, further entrenching caste divisions and hindering progress towards a more equitable

society. But is this a sustainable approach to governance, or does it perpetuate the very problems it seeks to address?

As we grapple with these questions, it becomes clear that the enduring influence of caste in India is a complex and multifaceted issue. Dismantling the caste system requires a comprehensive approach that tackles discrimination at all levels, from individual attitudes to institutional policies. But the path to progress is not an easy one. It requires a collective effort, a willingness to confront our biases, and a commitment to creating a more equitable future. As we embark on this journey, let us remember the words of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a champion of social justice and the architect of India's constitution: "If you believe in inequality, then it is your duty to end it."

Rationale

The exploration of psychometric tools is crucial in understanding the nuances of caste discrimination. These tools can provide valuable insights into the experiences of affected students, informing policies and practices that promote equity and inclusion within higher education (Rajshekarappa et al., 2023). By addressing these issues, institutions can work towards fostering a more just academic landscape that supports the diverse needs of all students.

Institutional discrimination remains a significant barrier in addressing caste inequalities. The Suk Dev Tores Committee and the Gllaya Perumal Committee on Untouchability have both highlighted systemic issues that perpetuate discrimination against marginalized communities (Teltumbde, 2021). Additionally, scholars like B. Kuppusamy have examined the impact of caste on educational settings, revealing how caste biases influence access to educational opportunities and outcomes (Kuppusamy, 2019). The need for a tool to analyze and measure caste discrimination in educational settings is further underscored by the ongoing debate about who has the right to write about these issues. As Freire (1970) argued, "pedagogy of the oppressed will be written by the oppressed which will emancipate the oppressor and the oppressed both" (p.2). By developing a robust tool, marginalized students can share their experiences and advocate for change, while institutions can gain valuable insights to inform evidence-based interventions.

Moreover, the development of such a tool is crucial in light of the UGC's recent directive to higher education institutions to provide detailed action-taken reports on preventing caste-based discrimination (Best Colleges, 2024). A standardized measure can help institutions track progress, identify areas for improvement, and ensure accountability in addressing these critical issues. Scholars like N. Sukumar have critically examined the systemic challenges that hinder Dalit students from accessing higher education opportunities, highlighting the unequal distribution of resources and the perpetuation of social exclusion on campuses (Rajshekarappa et al., 2023).

DISCUSSION

Caste-based discrimination remains a persistent challenge in higher education institutions across India. A recent study by Rajshekarappa et al. (2023) found that casteism is not only prevalent but also institutionalized in Indian academia. The systematic review of scales utilized to measure caste discrimination reveals a plethora of instruments, each with distinct psychometric properties, contributing to the understanding of discrimination and its impacts. The instruments identified in the review vary significantly in their design, purpose, and

validation methodologies, highlighting the complexity and multifaceted nature of caste discrimination.

This systematic review synthesizes findings from various psychometric scales designed to measure discrimination, particularly in the context of caste-based discrimination in higher education. The scales reviewed include the Adolescent Discrimination Distress Index (ADDI) by Fisher et al. (2000), which consists of 15 items and exhibits strong internal consistency (α = 0.83) and construct validity, making it relevant for understanding psychological distress among adolescents facing discrimination. The Index of Race-Related Stress (IRRS), developed by Utsey and Ponterotto (2000), comprises 46 items with an internal consistency of α = 0.87, capturing various dimensions of race-related stress applicable to caste experiences. The Detroit Area Study Discrimination Questionnaire (DAS-DQ by Taylor et al. (2004) includes 45 items and shows intern al consistency ranging from α = 0.63 to 0.80, serving as a valuable tool for assessing discrimination in community samples. Liang et al. (2004) introduced the Asian American Racism-Related Stress Inventory (AARRSI), which contains 29 items and demonstrates excellent internal consistency (α = 0.91), potentially adaptable for Dalit students in multicultural environments. The Experiences of Discrimination (EOD) scale by Kriegger et al. (2005) consists of 36 items with an internal consistency of α = 0.79, designed to assess self-reported discrimination experiences. Similarly, the perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire-Community Version (PEDQ-CV)by Brondolo et al. (2005) has 32 items and an internal consistency of α = 0.76, focusing on perceived ethnic discrimination. The General Ethnic Discrimination Scale (GEDS) developed by Landrine et al. (2006), with 18 items and strong internal consistency (α = 0.91), provides a framework for measuring ethnic discrimination that can be adapted to caste contexts. Paradies and Cunningham (2008) created the Measure of Indigenous Racism Experiences (MIRE), consisting of 31 items with internal consistency (α = 0.83) and good construct validity. The Coping With Discrimination Scale by Wei and Alvarez (2010), which includes 25 items and demonstrates internal consistency ranging from α = 0.72 to 0.90, is particularly relevant for understanding how Dalit students cope with discrimination. The Nordic Age Discrimination Scale (NADS), developed by Furunes and Mykletun (2010), consists of 6 items with internal consistency ranging from α = 0.82 to 0.87, highlighting the importance of addressing discrimination across various demographic factors. Lastly, the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS) by Nadal (2011), which includes 45 items and exhibits strong internal consistency (α = 0.93), is crucial for understanding subtle forms of discrimination faced by Dalit students.

The existing scales (TABLE), assess racial and ethnic discrimination at various levels, and share good psychometric properties, illustrating the rigor in methodology.

Scale Name	Author	No. of Items	Psychometric properties	Research Article
2000 Adolescent Discrimination Distress Index (ADDI)	Fisher et al.	15	Internal consistency (α = 0.83); construct validity	Fisher, C. B., Wallace, S. A., & Fenton, R. E. (2000). Discrimination distress during Adolescence.
2000 Index of Race-Related Stress (IRRS)	Utsey,S. O., & Ponterroto, J.G.	46	Internal Consistency (α= .87); concurrent validity	Development and Validation of the Index of Race-Related Stress (IRRS)

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Scale Name	Author	No. of Items	Psychometric properties	Research Article
2004 Detroit Area Study Discrimination Questionnaire (DAS-DQ)	Taylor et al.	45	Internal Consistency (α ranges from .63 to .80); convergent and construct validity	Validation of the Detroit Area Study Discrimination Scale in a Community Sample of Older African American Adults: The Pittsburgh Healthy Heart Project
2004 The Asian American Racism-Related Stress Inventory (AARRSI)	Liang et al.	29	Internal Consistency (α= .91); Good concurrent validity	The Asian American Racism-Related Stress Inventory: Development, Factor Analysis, Reliability, and Validity
2005 Experiences of Discrimination (EOD)	Kriegger et al.	36	Internal Consistency (α= .79)	Experiences of discrimination: Validityand reliabilityof a self-report measure for population health research on racism and health
2005 Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire-Community Version (PEDQ-CV)	Brondolo et al.	32	Internal consistency (α =0.76)	The Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire: Development and Preliminary Validation of a Community
2006 General Ethnic Discrimination Scale (GEDS)	Landrine et al.	18	Internal Consistency (α =0.91); Good convergent validity	Conceptualizing and Measuring Ethnic Discrimination in Health Research
2008 Measure of Indigenous Racism Experiences (MIRE)	Paradies, Y. C., & Cunningham, J.	31	Internal consistency (α = 0.83); Good construct and convergent validity	Development and validation of the Measure of Indigenous Racism Experiences (MIRE)
2010 Coping with Discrimination Scale	Wei, M & Alvarez, A.N	25	Internal Consistency (α ranging from .72 to .90); Good construct validity	Development and Validation of a Coping With Discrimination Scale: Factor Structure, Reliability, and Validity
2010 Nordic Age Discrimination Scale (NADS)	Furunes, T. & Mykletun, R. J.	6	Internal consistency (α ranging from 0.82 to 0.87); Good construct and convergent validity	Age discrimination in the workplace: Validation of the Nordic Age Discrimination Scale (NADS)
2011 The Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions	Nadal, K.L.	45	Internal Consistency (α= .93); concurrent	The Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS)

However, the present review sheds light on some important and alarming aspects related to study of caste based discrimination. First, the primary focus of these scales is on assessing the experience and frequency of discrimination across various contexts, such as race, ethnicity, age, gender, and mental health. While these scales provide valuable insights into the prevalence and types of discrimination experienced, they do not explicitly measure the

psychological impact on self-esteem or similar constructs. With research evidence strongly supporting the detrimental effect of caste based discrimination on one's concept of self (Johri & Anand, 2022) and other psychological variables, (Goghari & Kusi, 2023)., (Pal, 2015) understanding the effects becomes crucial and incorporating means to assess the same, is important.

The study's findings are corroborated by various reports and incidents that have surfaced in recent years. In 2021, a report based on Right to Information queries from the University of Hyderabad (UoH) revealed alleged caste discrimination in the institution's PhD admission process. Furthermore, the Union government recently disclosed that over 19,000 SC, ST, and OBC students had dropped out of central universities, IITs, and IIMs between 2018 and 2023 (The News Minute, 2023). These alarming numbers underscore the severity of the issue, with Dalit and Adivasi students facing immense challenges in navigating the academic landscape. The tragic suicides of Dalit students, such as Rohith Vemula at UoH in 2016 and more recently, Darshan Solanki at IIT Bombay, have sparked nationwide outrage and demands for systemic reforms to address caste discrimination in higher education (Rajshekarappa et al., 2023).

Addressing caste discrimination in higher education requires a multifaceted approach that tackles the issue at various levels. First and foremost, there is a need for adequate representation of Dalit and Adivasi faculty members in academic institutions. As former AICTE chairperson SS Mantha and former Education Secretary Ashok Thakur argue, increased representation of lowered caste faculty could provide much-needed mentorship and support to marginalized students, potentially reducing dropout rates (The News Minute, 2023).

Moreover, educational institutions must develop clear indicators to detect and address discrimination, laying out appropriate disciplinary measures for perpetrators (Human Rights Watch, 2015). The University Grants Commission (UGC) has taken several steps in this direction, issuing letters to universities urging them to take action against caste-based discrimination and constitute committees to address complaints from marginalized students and staff (UGC, 2021).However, these efforts have been largely inadequate in addressing the deep-rooted nature of casteism in Indian academia. As the India Exclusion Report (2014) highlights, exclusionary and discriminatory practices continue to prevail in schools and colleges, with teachers often discouraging hard work among Dalit and Adivasi students or questioning the value of education for these communities (Achiever IAS Classes, 2023). To break this cycle of discrimination, educational institutions must prioritize teacher training programs that promote greater interaction among children from diverse socio-economic and caste backgrounds (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Additionally, a system to track every child from enrollment through completion of grade VIII is crucial to ensure that marginalized students do not fall through the cracks (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

CONCLUSION
The scales reviewed, though robust and reliable, were primarily developed in different cultural contexts to measure various forms of discrimination such as racial, ethnic, and gender discrimination. These scales may not fully capture the intricacies and specific dynamics of caste discrimination unique to the Indian social structure. The absence of culturally specific tools may lead to underreporting or misrepresentation of the experiences of caste-based discrimination, given the lived experiences of individuals is strongly influenced by cultural factors.

The absence of standardized, culturally relevant tools limits the ability to conduct large-scale, systematic research on caste discrimination. This in turn affects advocacy efforts aimed at addressing caste-based inequalities. Reliable data is essential for raising awareness, influencing public opinion, and lobbying for legislative changes. Without appropriate tools, the scope and impact of research and advocacy are significantly constrained.

Considering the extent of entrenchment of caste as a construct in varied areas of society, the number of tools available in the Indian context is still minimal. While some of the existing scales can potentially be adapted for use in measuring caste discrimination in India, considering their robust psychometric properties and established reliability in different contexts, the adaptation would require a careful validation process to ensure cultural relevance and appropriateness for the Indian context. But this does come with a number of limitations which need to be reviewed.

To address this limitation, there is a critical need for the development of scales specifically designed to measure caste discrimination in India. Developing culturally relevant and psychometrically sound tools is essential for accurately capturing the realities of caste discrimination and fostering meaningful social change.

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Conflict of Interest
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