

## Influence of Marital Status and Income on Social Dominance Orientation: A Study Among Naga Men

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### ABSTRACT

Social Dominance Theory (SDT) argues that there are individual differences on Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) and that these differences influence an individual's behaviour in intergroup relations. In Nagaland patriarchy is strongly rooted in the Naga traditions and men enjoy more privileges over women in many aspects of the society. The present study is the first in Nagaland to explore SDO among Naga men with an aim to better understand intergroup relations in the context of gender. The sample for the study consisted of 240 men within the ages of 18 to 65 years. The results of the study found a majority of the Naga men scoring high on SDO. Welch's t-test showed a significant difference in SDO between the married and the unmarried men ( $t = 4.88$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Kruskal-Wallis H test showed no significant difference on SDO among the lower income, middle income and upper income families.

**Keywords:** *Social Dominance Orientation, Intergroup Relations, Naga Men, Marital Status, Income Level*

Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) is the extent to which an individual desires and support group-based hierarchies and inequalities (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). It is a general attitudinal support for domination of certain groups by other groups, whether these groups may be defined in terms of race, sex, social class, religion, clan, ethnicity or any other group that is conceivable to the human mind. SDO is an important construct in the Social Dominance Theory (SDT) by Sidanius and Pratto (2001) which was developed in order to understand how social inequalities emerge and are maintained. The SDT posits that social inequality is produced and reproduced through an interaction of individuals' attitudes about inequality between social groups with societal and institutional forces. It argues that differences exist between individuals in their desire and support for group-based hierarchies and inequalities and that these difference also have the potential of affecting an individual's behaviour in intergroup relations.

Studies have found the versatility and usefulness of SDO in understanding intergroup behaviour, generalised prejudice and socio-political and policy preferences (Ho et al., 2012, Ho et al., 2015). Broadly, SDO is considered to have two distinct but strongly related sub-

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dimensions, namely, SDO-D (dominance sub-dimension) and SDO-E (antiegaltarianism sub-dimension). The SDO-D reflects support for group-based dominance and it has been found to predict aggressive intergroup behaviours and conflicts and old-fashioned racism (Ho et al., 2012). The SDO-E reflects opposition to group based equality and it has been found to predict subtle forms of intergroup bias such as perpetuation of group-based inequality (Ho et al., 2012). Studies have demonstrated that the two dimensions of SDO relate differentially to intergroup behaviour (Kugler et al., 2010; Ho et al., 2012; Ho et al., 2015). Where SDO-D implies support for oppression or overt intergroup aggression and hostility, SDO-E is more related with support for social hierarchy through legitimising myths such as symbolic racism which may imply that certain groups have the legitimacy to control access to resources, thus reflecting opposition to social policies that are aimed at equality. SDO-D and SDO-E are two conceptually different but related dimensions of SDO and these dimensions predicts qualitatively different intergroup phenomena.

The SDT posits that social inequality is produced and reproduced through an interaction of individuals' attitudes about inequality between social groups with societal and institutional forces. It argues that differences exist between individuals in their desire and support for group-based hierarchies and inequalities, and that these difference also has the potential of affecting an individuals' behaviour in intergroup relations. Either of the two dimensions of SDO can be more consequential than the other with regard to intergroup behaviour and conflicts, and this consequential outcome can be resultant of the individuals' sociostructural context (Ho et al., 2012).

Individuals are said to differ in their levels of SDO, and that this difference in the levels of SDO is due to socialisation and situational factors. People from higher status groups had been consistently found to have higher levels of SDO (Sidanius et al., 2000; Pratto et al, 2006; Snellman et al, 2009; Kteily et al, 2012; Ho et al, 2015). A possible reason for the higher levels of SDO among the higher status groups is because of the privileges that the higher status groups enjoy which leads to reaffirmation of the rightness inequality in their minds (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). The experience that people from higher group status enjoy leads them to become more favourably oriented towards group based dominance in comparison to lower status groups.

Nagaland is a state in the North-eastern part of India. The society in Nagaland is patriarchal and this patriarchy is strongly rooted in the Naga traditions. In the traditional Naga society, men occupied higher social status as compared to women and they have been the decision makers and policy makers in various social settings. They enjoyed full inheritance rights and occupied a privileged position over women. In the present day context, women in the Naga society have attained levels at par with their men counterparts in terms of educational and other achievements. However, the social hierarchical structure in gender relations has not changed much with men still enjoying the privileged positions in various societal institutions. It is therefore pertinent to examine constructs such as the SDO in order to better understand intergroup relations, particularly gender relations, in the Naga society. This study is an initial attempt to examine SDO among Naga men which thus far has remained unexplored.

Marriage and family are one of the most basic units of the society, and it is through marriage and family that status roles are created and sanctioned. Marriage serves an important transition in the life and status of the individual. Not only is marriage attached with certain

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social prestige, but it also provides opportunities for elevation of social and economic status of the individual (Shohe, 2021) and this is particularly true in the context of the Naga society where the families are patrilineal and married men enjoy certain status and role, not just in the family, but in the society at large. SDT posits that people of higher status groups have higher SDO therefore it can be expected that married men will have higher SDO compared with unmarried men. This study will be the first to explore the influence of marital status on SDO, especially among the Naga men.

Household income is an important determinant of status in society. In one early study on SDO by Sidanius et al (1994), higher level of income was found to be associated with lower SDO and lower level of income was associated with higher SDO. Contradictory findings were also observed in other studies. For instance, Foster (2021) observed that higher levels of income were associated with higher levels of SDO. This study will explore if level of income among Naga men has an influence on SDO by examining the difference on SDO with three levels of income.

This present study will explore the differential expression of SDO between married and unmarried men as well as between men belonging to higher income families and men belonging to lower income families. The findings of this study will add to the understanding of the underpinnings of the nature of group based dominance and hierarchy.

### ***Objectives of the study***

- To assess the levels of SDO among Naga men.
- To explore differences in SDO in Naga men by marital status and household income level.

## **METHOD**

### ***Variables***

- SDO as measured by SDO 7 Scale was taken as the dependent variable.
- Demographic variables included marital status and income level.

### ***Sample***

The sample includes 240 Naga men with age ranging from 18-65 years. All the participants had educational level above the 12<sup>th</sup> standard. Out of the total sample, 106 were unmarried and 134 were married. Participants belonged to three income categories: lower income class with household income below two lakhs per annum (n=20), middle income class with household income between two to five lakh per annum (n=152) and upper class (n=68) with household income above five lakhs per annum. The sample was based on incidental sampling from two districts of Nagaland, namely, Kohima and Dimapur. Participation was voluntary and consent was obtained from the participants before the questionnaire was administered for the study.

### ***Tools Used***

The SDO 7 Scale (Ho et al., 2015) was used to assess the SDO for the study. The SDO 7 is the most recent scale measuring social dominance orientation which is a generalized orientation towards hierarchy. The SDO 7 has 16 items that are scored on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The scale also consists of the two sub-dimensions: dominance (SDO-D) and anti-egalitarianism (SDO-E). The SDO 7 has

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well established validity. The SDO 7 has high correlation with criterion variables – with SDO-D being strongly correlated with old-fashioned racism, group competition, and support for aggression and violence toward low status groups; while SDO-E being strongly correlated with system legitimacy beliefs and political conservatism, support for unequal distribution of resources, opposition to policies aimed at equality, and subtle prejudice (Ho et al., 2015). The Cronbach’s Alpha for the current sample was found to be .74.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For assessing the levels of SDO, scores above 3.5 were taken as high and below it were taken as low. Table 1 shows percentages of participants expressing low and high SDO. It is seen that a greater percentage of the participants (62%) reported high level of SDO. Amongst unmarried men, the percentages of participants scoring low and high SDO were more or less equal. However, among married men, more number of participants (73%) scored high SDO. Looking at levels of SDO by income level, amongst lower and middle income men, greater percentage of the participants showed high SDO.

**Table 1: Frequency and Percentage of Participants Reporting Low and High SDO**

Demographic variables		<i>n</i>	Low SDO f (%)	High SDO f (%)
<b>Marital status</b>	Unmarried	106	56 (53%)	50 (47%)
	Married	134	36 (27%)	98 (73%)
<b>Income</b>	Lower Income Households	20	7 (35%)	13 (65%)
	Middle Income Households	152	54 (36%)	98 (64%)
	Upper Income Households	68	31 (46%)	37 (54%)
<b>Total sample</b>		240	92 (38%)	148 (62%)

The mean SDO of the total sample was 3.45 ( $SD = 0.73$ ; 95%  $CI = 3.34$  to  $3.52$ ). Table 2 shows the mean scores by marital status and income groups. While there are not many studies that have reported the SDO of men of other cultures, the SDO of the present study sample is higher than what were reported of some other cultural groups. For instance, in a study by Levin et al (2002) on an Israeli sample, mean SDO was observed to be 2.56 ( $SD=1.06$ ); Batalha et al., (2011) found mean SDO of their Australian male sample to be 2.77 ( $SD=1.00$ ) and of their Swede male sample to be 2.11 ( $SD=0.76$ ); Snellman et al., (2009) also reported the mean SDO of their male sample of university students from Sweden to be 1.86 ( $SD=0.55$ ). Although the obtained mean SDO of the present study is not so high, yet it is still noteworthy that the sample mean is higher than what was observed in many other cultures. SDT explains that discrimination causes and is caused by social hierarchies, and thus higher levels of SDO is expected in societies that have high levels of discrimination (Fischer et al, 2012). It could be implied from the review of existing literature that Naga men possess high SDO as compared to men of other cultures which probably could be because of deep rooted patriarchy in the Naga society. SDO reflects the extent to which individuals desire and support group-based hierarchies and inequalities. Fischer et al (2012) in a cross-cultural analysis of 27 societies found, societies that are more traditional and dominated by men was associated with higher levels of SDO. Thus, the observed SDO among Naga men in the present study could be used as a measure of the extent of their endorsement for gender-based hierarchies and inequalities and is an important indicator of the existing gender dynamics in the Naga society.

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For assessing differences on SDO by marital status Welch's t-test was used. Significant difference in SDO ( $t= 4.88$ ;  $p<.001$ ) as well as in its two dimensions SDO-D ( $t= 3.94$ ;  $p<.001$ ) and SDO-E ( $t=4.15$ ;  $p<.001$ ) were observed by marital status. As shown in Table 2, married men ( $M=3.63$ ) scored significantly higher on SDO as compared to unmarried men ( $M= 3.18$ ). The result shows that married men have higher levels of SDO compared with unmarried men. Similarly, married Naga men also scored significantly higher on both the dimensions of SDO – SDO-D (married men:  $M=3.87$ ; unmarried men:  $M=3.44$ ) and SDO-E (married men:  $M=3.38$ ; unmarried men  $M=2.92$ ). The fact that married Naga men are higher on SDO-D indicates support for oppression against members of inferior groups through use of aggression and hostility. The high SDO-E among married Naga men also indicates support for social hierarchy through use of legitimising myths. The high SDO among married Naga men may be attributed to the social prestige and status that comes with marriage as evidenced in the culture of the Nagas.

**Table 2: Table for Means and Standard Deviations**

Demographic variables		n	Mean	SD
<b>Marital status</b>	Unmarried	106	3.18	0.80
	Married	134	3.63	0.59
<b>Income</b>	Lower Income Households	20	3.39	0.58
	Middle Income Households	152	3.47	0.71
	Upper Income Households	68	3.33	0.73

Another reason for the higher SDO among married Naga men may be attributed to the age factor in the sample. In the sample for the study married Naga men were older in age ( $M = 47$ ) compared to unmarried men ( $M= 28$ ). Sidanius and Pratto (1999) reasons that because societies privilege the older adults over younger adults and children, older people can be expected to have higher SDO than younger people (as cited in Worley, 2022, p.1-2) and it has been so observed in previous studies (Villano and Zani, 2007). In the Naga society, village administration, which is the unique social fabric of the Naga community, is done only by adult men who have attained certain age rendering older adult men to an elevated status in the society. It is therefore possible that age may be mediating the influence of marital status on SDO in the present study. Future studies in SDO may therefore explore the role of age and other possible factors that might give more information in understating the influence of marital status in SDO, particularly in the context of Naga men. Whatever may be the contributing factor, this finding that married men possess higher SDO than unmarried men is notable in itself and is an important contribution towards understanding the construct SDO.

For assessing differences in SDO by income level, Kruskal-Wallis H test was employed as data set did not meet the assumption of normality and the sample sizes were not the same. Results showed no significant differences among the three income groups in SDO ( $H=1.609$ ,  $p=.447$ ). No significant differences were also observed across the three income groups with respect to its two dimensions - SDO-D ( $H=2.070$ ,  $p=.355$ ) and SDO-E ( $U=2.947$ ,  $p=.229$ ). The findings indicate that household income has no significant effect on the construct SDO and its sub-dimensions among Naga men. In one of the early studies on SDO, Sidanius et al. (1994) had reported that SDO decreases with increased household income. In another study Foster (2021), found higher levels of income to be associated with higher levels of SDO. The role of income in SDO, therefore, remains inconclusive. However, in the present study

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though no significant differences in SDO by income level were observed, it is seen that majority of the participants in all the three income groups had considerably high SDO. Fischer et al (2012), in a cross-cultural study, had suggested that it is not the level of income but income opportunities available within the society that can predict individuals' SDO. Fischer et al (2012) also noted that economic inequalities predict higher SDO. It may be mentioned that the present day Naga society live under conditions of very limited income opportunities and huge economic inequalities. Thus, the relatively high levels of SDO that was seen in the study sample across all income groups could be due to the economic struggles and perceived inequities that exists within the Naga society which may be explored by future studies.

### CONCLUSION

The present study is the first to explore SDO among men in the Naga society and has demonstrated the existing levels of SDO among Naga men. The role of marital status and income level in SDO have also been explored, the findings of which can contribute towards the limited body of knowledge in understanding SDO. Although there are certain limitations such as limited sample size and reliance on non-probability sampling, the findings of the study make an important contribution towards literature in SDO and can be considered as an important base in understanding SDO in respect of Naga men.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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