

Survey

Discrimination Experienced by Boys from Lower Socioeconomic Background: Findings from A Survey

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the perceived everyday discrimination experienced by boys aged 12 to 15 from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Using the Everyday Discrimination Scale (EDS), data were collected from 70 participants in semi-urban schools and community organizations. Results show that discrimination is a common and varied experience in this population, with participants reporting moderate to high levels of perceived unfair treatment in daily interactions. The study emphasizes the need to consider socioeconomic status as a distinct and significant factor in social exclusion. It also highlights the importance of developing targeted, context-sensitive interventions to support marginalized boys. These findings contribute to the limited research on discrimination at the intersection of class and gender, offering insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers.

Keywords: *Discrimination, Boys, Socioeconomic status*

Social inequality continues to be a pervasive issue globally, affecting individuals' access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. While the intersection of gender and socioeconomic status (SES) has been widely studied, most existing literature tends to focus on the disadvantages faced by girls or women from low-income backgrounds. Far less attention has been paid to the unique forms of discrimination that boys from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may encounter, both within institutional systems and in everyday social interactions. This paper seeks to address this gap by examining how boys from economically disadvantaged families experience discrimination, using original survey data to shed light on the issue.

Discrimination based on socioeconomic status is not a new phenomenon. Individuals from low-income families often face systemic barriers that limit their social mobility, ranging from under-resourced schools to biased expectations from authority figures (Reardon, 2011; Lareau, 2015). These challenges are compounded when intersecting with other identity markers, such as race, gender, or geography. However, the particular experiences of boys—especially in the context of early education, peer relationships, and social services—have not been adequately explored in either academic research or policy frameworks.

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Received: May 21, 2025; Revision Received: May 24, 2025; Accepted: May 27, 2025

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One reason for this research gap is the widespread perception that boys, as a gender group, are less vulnerable than girls. Historically, gender-based studies have rightly highlighted the structural and interpersonal discrimination that girls and women face. However, this has sometimes led to a neglect of the nuanced ways in which boys—particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds—are disadvantaged. For example, recent studies have shown that boys in low-income communities are more likely to be subject to harsher disciplinary actions in schools, are overrepresented in special education programs, and often internalize societal expectations around masculinity that discourage emotional expression or academic engagement (Morris, 2005; Noguera, 2008).

The underachievement of boys in education, especially those from socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, has become a growing concern. In the United Kingdom and the United States, statistics indicate that boys from poorer families are more likely to drop out of school, score lower on standardized tests, and be suspended or expelled at higher rates than their more affluent peers (OECD, 2015). These patterns are not merely educational but reflect broader social dynamics, including stigmatization, lack of mentorship, and reduced access to resources. Understanding how discrimination manifests for this group is critical for designing equitable interventions and inclusive policies.

This study aims to contribute to the limited body of research by focusing on the lived experiences of boys from low-income families, as reported through a targeted survey. The survey explores various domains education, peer relationships, community interactions, and institutional settings—to capture the range of discriminatory experiences these boys face. The research is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and social reproduction theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), which together help contextualize how structural inequalities are perpetuated across generations and how different axes of identity interact to shape individual outcomes.

In addition to bridging a research gap, this study also has practical implications. Policymakers, educators, and social service providers frequently design interventions with a one-size-fits-all approach, often overlooking the specific challenges faced by subgroups within the larger low-SES population. By bringing empirical evidence to light, this paper seeks to inform more nuanced policy discussions and encourage the development of targeted strategies that address the unique needs of boys from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

While discrimination is often discussed in terms of race or gender alone, this research underscores the importance of considering class as a standalone axis of marginalization. More importantly, it advocates for a more granular understanding of how young boys, shaped by both economic hardship and societal expectations of masculinity, navigate a world that frequently marginalizes them in subtle but consequential ways.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Objectives

The objective of this study is to describe the perceived everyday discrimination experienced by boys from lower socioeconomic backgrounds by assessing the frequency, extent, and variability of discriminatory experiences using the Everyday Discrimination Scale, thereby providing foundational data to inform future research and interventions.

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Participants

The study involved 70 male participants, aged 12 to 15 years, all identified as coming from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. A random sampling technique was used to select participants from schools and community-based organizations located in semi-urban areas.

Materials

The primary instrument used in this study was the Everyday Discrimination Scale (EDS) developed by Williams et al. (1997). The EDS is designed to measure individuals' perceptions of unfair treatment in day-to-day interactions. It comprises nine core items, each assessing different forms of routine discrimination such as being treated with less courtesy or respect, being perceived as less intelligent, or being threatened or harassed.

The EDS has demonstrated high internal consistency across various populations, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.81 to 0.86 (Williams et al., 1997). It has also been validated for use across diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups, making it suitable for the current study population.

Data Collection

A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed for this study. Data were collected through structured, face-to-face administration of the Everyday Discrimination Scale to ensure clarity and understanding among adolescent participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained.

Scoring

Each item on the EDS is rated on a **six-point Likert scale**:

- 1 = Never
- 2 = Less than once a year
- 3 = A few times a year
- 4 = A few times a month
- 5 = At least once a week
- 6 = Almost every day

Responses were summed to compute a total discrimination score for each participant. Higher scores reflect greater perceived everyday discrimination.

Variables

The primary variable of interest in this study is perceived discrimination, defined as an individual's experience of unjust treatment or social exclusion based on socioeconomic status, class, caste, or other marginalizing characteristics. The Everyday Discrimination Scale was adapted for adolescent use and served as the operational tool for measuring this construct.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to examine perceived everyday discrimination among boys aged 12 to 15 years from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, using the Everyday Discrimination Scale (EDS). The findings are presented in Table 1.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Discrimination	70	34	9	43	27.99	8.697
Class	70	2	6	8	7.20	.672
Age	70	3	12	15	13.49	1.046

The mean discrimination score across participants was 27.99 (SD = 8.697), with individual scores ranging from 9 to 43. Given that the maximum possible score on the Everyday Discrimination Scale is 54 (9 items × 6 points), the observed average suggests that participants experience moderate to high levels of perceived everyday discrimination. This aligns with prior findings showing that youth from marginalized socioeconomic backgrounds often report heightened perceptions of unfair treatment in school and social settings (Benner & Graham, 2013; Williams et al., 1997).

The mean age of participants was 13.49 years (SD = 1.046), and the mean class level was 7.20, indicating that most participants were in early adolescence. While the present study employed descriptive statistics only, the broad range in discrimination scores (from 9 to 43) suggests notable variability in individual experiences, despite the relatively narrow range of class level (6 to 8).

This variation may reflect the nuanced and context-dependent nature of discrimination, which can differ according to local cultural norms, institutional practices, and interpersonal dynamics. Seaton et al. (2008) emphasized that early adolescents are capable of recognizing and interpreting discrimination, especially when it relates to identity markers such as socioeconomic status or appearance. Moreover, prior research suggests that even subtle cues of exclusion or condescension can have lasting psychological effects during this developmental period (García Coll et al., 1996).

The decision to administer the EDS through structured, face-to-face interviews was intended to increase response validity by ensuring participant understanding—an important consideration in adolescent research (Williams et al., 1997). The EDS has demonstrated strong psychometric properties across varied demographic groups, making it suitable for use with socioeconomically marginalized youth.

However, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, without a control or comparison group (e.g., youth from higher socioeconomic backgrounds or girls from the same context), it is not possible to determine the relative magnitude of discrimination experienced. Second, while the descriptive data provide valuable insight, the absence of inferential analysis prevents conclusions about statistical relationships or predictors of perceived discrimination.

In summary, the findings suggest that boys from lower socioeconomic backgrounds perceive meaningful levels of discrimination in their daily lives. These results underscore the need for inclusive educational practices, sensitivity training for teachers and community leaders, and policy efforts aimed at reducing class-based prejudice. Future research should explore causal relationships and include more diverse samples to expand the current understanding of adolescent experiences of socioeconomic discrimination.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significance of perceived everyday discrimination among boys from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. It reveals that discrimination is a common and varied experience in this group. The findings emphasize the need to recognize socioeconomic status as a critical factor in social exclusion. This research identifies the importance of targeted interventions tailored to address the specific challenges faced by these boys. It shows that schools and communities must adopt more inclusive and sensitive practices. The study also underlines the role of societal expectations and norms in shaping discriminatory experiences. Finally, it opens avenues for further research to explore underlying mechanisms and develop effective policies to reduce class-based discrimination.

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Acknowledgment

I sincerely thank all the boys who participated in this study and shared their valuable experiences. I am grateful to the schools and community organizations for their support in facilitating data collection. I also extend my appreciation to my research guide Dr. K.M.

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Tripathi and friends for their insightful guidance and encouragement throughout this project. Without their help, this work would not have been possible.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Goel, S. & Tripathi, K.M. (2025). Discrimination Experienced by Boys from Lower Socioeconomic Background: Findings from A Survey. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 13(2), 2614-2619. DIP:18.01.231.20251302, DOI:10.25215/1302.231