

Research Paper

## Perceived Discrimination and Personal Self Concept: A Comparative Study Among Male and Female Young Adults

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### ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to compare the relationship of perceived discrimination and personal self-concept among men and women. Discrimination is unequal treatment which is based on social structures that allow one group to maintain power and privileges over others. Perceived discrimination refers to the distinct stressful life experiences of unfair treatment based on personal attributes. Self-concept is a person's perception of himself. An individual's experiences, in all their great diversity, constitute the data on which he bases his perceptions of himself. The construct is potentially important and useful in explaining and predicting how one acts. The sample of the study consisted of 60 participants, which included 30 males and 30 females. The sample chosen for the study was of the age group 18-25 years. The tools used for measuring the perceived discrimination was perceived discrimination scale (Williams, Yu, Jackson, and Anderson in 1997). Personal self-concept was measured by using Personal self-concept questionnaire (Goñi, Madriaga, Axpe in 2011). Statistical methods used for the analysis of data were independent sample t-test and Pearson correlation coefficient. The major findings of the study were that there is no correlation between perceived discrimination and personal self-concept among men and women, and there is no significant difference in both, perceived discrimination and personal self-concept, among men and women.

**Keywords:** *Perceived Discrimination, Personal Self Concept, Men, women*

Young adulthood—ages approximately 18 to 26—is a critical time in life. What happens during these years has profound and long-lasting implications for young adults' future employment and career paths and for their economic security, health, and well-being. Young adults are key contributors to the nation's workforce and military services and, since many are parents, to the healthy development and well-being of the next generation.

In recent decades, the world has changed in ways that place greater demands on young adults and provide less latitude for failure. The disruption and lengthening of established social and economic pathways into adulthood—graduating from high school, entering college or the work-force, taking on civic engagement and national service, leaving home,

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finding a spouse or partner, and starting a family—have presented more choices and opportunities for some young adults, and more barriers for others. And the transition to adulthood reflects the end of trial periods and the beginning of more consequential actions.

Providing educational, economic, social, and health supports will help young adults assume adult roles, develop marketable skills, and adopt healthy lifelong habits that will benefit them, their children, and the nation. Despite popular attention to some of the special circumstances of young adults, however, they are too rarely treated as a distinct population in policy, program design, and research. Instead, they are often grouped with adolescents or, more often, with all adults.

### ***Perceived Discrimination***

Discrimination is unequal treatment which is based on social structures that allow one group to maintain power and privileges over others. Perceived discrimination refers to the distinct stressful life experiences of unfair treatment based on personal attributes. Additionally, caste-based discrimination may lead people from the lower castes to have lower levels of education, employment, access to services, socioeconomic status, and per capita income and the same inequality can also arise if groups differ in relevant economic classes. The subjective interpretation of events as discriminatory may differ from actual discrimination, for example, because of a tendency to deny personal discrimination. It is the subjective experiences of ethnic discrimination that will affect psychological well-being and feelings of self-esteem. Discriminatory behaviors include a wide range of acts, forms, actors, and settings. Discrimination can involve social exclusion or harassment, can be subtle or more open, can be incidental or more systematic, can be context specific or cross-situational, and can be based on different category memberships such as race, ethnicity, and gender. Across types of discrimination, there appears to be negative relations between discrimination and self-esteem. Higher distress responses to racism from peers and educational systems was related to lower self-esteem. For college students, racial microaggressions have been found to be related to lower self-esteem.

The caste and the socio-economic class to which an individual belongs can be essential for the identity of the person and it also shapes the life experiences of individuals to a great extent. The Indian caste system is the world's longest-surviving social hierarchy and it continues to be an essential component of Indian society even today. Belonging to a particular caste and economic class has a multitude of implications and the most damaging one is discrimination. India's reservation policy is one of the world's most ambitious affirmative action policies. The policy of reservation in India is a social justice initiative aimed at correcting historical and ongoing discrimination against marginalized and underprivileged communities, including scheduled castes (SCs), scheduled tribes (STs), and other backward classes (OBCs). Despite this, the reservation policy remains as a significant and complex issue, with proponents and opponents alike grappling with its implications for social justice, meritocracy, and equality. While the reservation system has helped in the socioeconomic empowerment of marginalized communities, there are debates about its efficacy and potential drawbacks, such as the exclusion of deserving candidates from other communities. The issue remains complex and sensitive, and any changes or reforms to the reservation system will require careful consideration and deliberation. Individuals continue to be widely discriminated against based on their socioeconomic status. A systematic review and meta-analysis revealed that the low socioeconomic status of an individual is positively correlated with being the victim of bullying. People from low socio-economic status often

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face a dearth of resources and also, have to consistently deal with scarcity and unpredictability. This may give rise to cognitive processes where individuals lean towards external factors, threats, constraints and others when perceiving and understanding situations and behaviour. This is called the contextualist social-cognitive tendencies. This might affect the appraisal process of individuals which is a factor that may affect the self-efficacy of an individual. Numerous studies confirmed the relationship between parents' low SES and poor health, as well as slow-moving children development, spreading through the entire span from infancy to adulthood. Variances in experiencing stress are differentially associated with growing up in more or less well-resourced households. Researchers have confirmed that growing up in a materially adverse conditions and unsupportive environment has negative impact on school success. High economic demands on parents often result in stress and the accompanying emotional and mental problems affect the quality of parenting, which is ultimately strongly reflected on the quality of children's social adjustment in general and on their health in particular.

### *Personal Self concept*

Self-concept is a person's perception of himself. An individual's experiences, in all their great diversity, constitute the data on which he bases his perceptions of himself. The construct is potentially important and useful in explaining and predicting how one acts. One's perceptions of himself are thought to influence the ways in which he acts, and his acts in turn influence the ways in which he perceives himself. Self-concept is inferred from a person's responses to situations. The development of one's self-concept can be influenced by one's family dynamics as well as the family's socioeconomic status. For example, families that are economically stable are likely to provide for the socioeconomic needs of their children. The sound socioeconomic needs of families are therefore likely to contribute to the satisfaction of learners' diverse needs. When these needs are met there is a possibility that learners' self-image may improve, leading to positive self-concept. But if some of these needs are not met due to socioeconomic status of parents, self-concept development may be hampered.

Caste is also a fundamentally psychological construct. Caste group members position themselves, psychologically, in relation to the caste system. Moreover, it is likely that, in many cases, caste identity or caste group affiliation may serve particular psychological functions for the self-concept; in some cases, it may provide feelings of belongingness or self-esteem. In essence, caste groups are social identity categories and in self-identifying as members of these categories, individuals' social identities as caste group members become salient. The conceptualisation of caste as a social identity marks an important transition in social scientific research into caste; it enables researchers to explore the meanings and functions associated with caste group membership for the self-concept. The categories represent a way of organizing experiences and giving them meaning. Studies also suggests that emerging adulthood is a transition period of malleability, where life experiences can influence feelings of self-worth. Self-efficacy is also considered an essential trait in emerging adulthood, a period where young adults make independent career and personal decisions often for the first time. Motivation and belief in one's ability to achieve desired goals are critical for the future planning associated with this time.

Socioeconomic status (SES) is a system of stratification, in which individuals are ranked based on access to material and social resources. SES is typically indexed by objective markers such as education, income, and occupational prestige, and/or subjective status. As

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compared to those with lower SES backgrounds, individuals with higher SES backgrounds tend to be better educated, wealthier, occupy more prestigious jobs, and place themselves higher on the ladder of social status. Access to these resources enables higher SES individuals to act as they wish, whereas limited access forces lower SES individuals to experience more constraints and challenges in their lives. It is likely then that the resources and freedom available to high SES individuals allow them to promote the self and self-set goals (i.e., self-orientation). Conversely, the constraints and the lack of resources faced by low SES individuals make it more difficult for them to pursue self-oriented tasks. Extant evidence lends support to these views in both Western and non-Western cultures. The higher-class identities that indicate higher status are likely to be more psychologically satisfying and thus more subjectively important to people's self-definitions. Individuals who have high incomes, are highly educated, and work in prestigious occupations are afforded higher social status within capitalist societies compared to individuals with lower incomes, less education, and less prestigious occupations. Thus, identities tied to one's income, education level, and occupation are likely to be strongly associated with a subjective sense of status, which in turn is associated with a sense of self-esteem. Indeed, research has shown that people derive self-esteem from identities that provide them with a sense of social status, and that they place greater importance on identities that provide them with a sense of self-esteem. Researchers have also argued that the desire for status is a fundamental human motive and strongly related to self-esteem. This is in line with the motive for self-enhancement, which drives people to emphasize positive aspects of themselves. Research has shown that people from lower class backgrounds suffer from stereotype threat in achievement domains, leading to disengagement and withdrawal, and that people with low levels of education defensively marginalize education-based identities.

### *Aim of the Study*

The study intends to explore the relationship between perceived discrimination and personal self-concept a comparative study among male and female young adults.

### *Objectives of the Study*

- To find out the relationship between perceived discrimination and personal self-concept.
- To find out whether there is any significant difference in perceived discrimination among male and female young adults.
- To find out whether there is any significant difference in personal self-concept among male and female young adults.

### *Hypotheses of the Study*

- Ho1-There is no significant difference in perceived discrimination among male and female young adults.
- Ho2-There is no significant difference in personal self-concept among male and female young adults.
- Ho3-There is no significant relationship between perceived discrimination and personal self-concept.

## **METHOD**

### *Participants*

For the purpose of the data collection males and females belonging to the category young adults within the age group of 18 to 25 years were collected. It was ascertained to collect an

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equal number of male and female young adults that is 30 each. Data was collected through google forms from the people who belong to the sample group. Random sampling method was used.

### *Variables*

- **Independent variable:** Socioeconomic status
- **Dependent variable:** Perceived discrimination

### *Measures*

- **Perceived Discrimination Scale (Williams, Yu, Jackson, & Anderson in 1997):** The 20-item Perceived Discrimination Scale has two subscales: The Lifetime Discrimination Scale and the Daily Discrimination Scale. Respondents complete the 11-item Lifetime Discrimination scale by indicating how many times they have been treated unfairly over the course of their lives (e.g., “You were discouraged by a teacher or advisor from seeking higher education”). To score this scale, researchers add the number of events that happened at least once for the respondent. Higher scores on this scale mean more experiences of lifetime discrimination. The 9-item Daily Discrimination scale captures respondents’ experiences with unfair treatment in their day-to-day lives (e.g., “You are treated with less courtesy than other people”). Respondents complete the Daily Discrimination Scale by indicating how often they feel discriminated against on a 1 to 4 scale (1 = often; 2 = sometimes; 3 = rarely; 4 = never). To score this scale, researchers reverse code all items and add the scores together, so that higher scores mean more frequent experiences of discrimination.
- **Personal Self-Concept Questionnaire:** Personal Self-Concept Questionnaire (PSQ) developed by Goñi, Madariaga, Axpe & Goñi (2011) in which the statements were related to the dimensions of self-concept (i.e. honesty, autonomy, self-fulfillment, emotional self-concept). This questionnaire consisted of 18-items that are rated using a 5-point Likert Scale (1 = Totally Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Totally Agree). Its aim was to measure the personal domain of self-concept through 4 subscales; self-fulfillment, honesty, autonomy, and emotional self-concept. Higher score indicated higher sense of self-concept. The internal consistency of the instrument in its original version is .834.

### *Statistical Analysis*

Analysis of data were done by Karl Pearson correlation and independent t-test.

### *Procedure*

For the purpose of the data collection males and females belonging to the category young adults within the age group of 18 to 25 years were collected. It was ascertained to collect an equal number of male and female young adults that is 30 each. Data was collected through google forms from the people who belong to the sample group. Random sampling method was used. Participants were required to fill out data regarding the demographic factors and the scales which included perceived discrimination scale and personal self-concept questionnaire. The responses obtained were scored based on the scoring criteria provided for each questionnaire in the manual. Further, data analysis was done through the statistical analysis that is, Pearson correlation coefficient and independent sample t-test. This was done

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to find out the relationship between perceived discrimination and personal self-concept among male and female young adults.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the result and discussion of the study acquired after the comprehensive statistical analysis of the data which was collected for the present study, then the results were interpreted. The purpose of the study was to compare perceived discrimination and personal self-concept among young adults. The data was collected from 60 young adults, among them 30 were boys and 30 were girls. In this study, an approach called random sampling was used.

*Table 1.1 Shows the Mean, SD and t value of the Variable Perceived Discrimination among male and female young adults*

Variable	Group	Sample Size	Mean	SD	t-Value	Sig.(2-tailed)
PD	Males	30	16.2759	5.70023	-0.787	0.434
	Females	30	15.2258	4.60224	-0.787	0.434

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$  \*\* $p < 0.01$  \* $p < 0.05$

Table 1.1 shows the comparison of perceived discrimination among male and female young adults. It indicates the sample size, mean, SD, t-value and significance (two-tailed). The sample size of males and females was 30. Males had a mean of 16.2759 with SD of 5.70023 while females had a mean score of 15.2258 with SD of 4.60224. The t-value was -0.787 at significance of 0.434 > 0.05.

From Table 1.1, it is evident that the significance value 0.434 > 0.05. This implies that there is no significant difference in perceived discrimination between the genders. Null Hypothesis 1 stands accepted. This could be because both males and females experience discrimination based on multiple aspects of their identity, such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability or socioeconomic status. Shifts in social norms, increased awareness and education on this particular category of young adults can also be a contributory factor to the above result.

*Table 1.2 Shows the Mean, SD and t value of the Variable Personal Self -concept among male and female young adults*

Variable	Group	Sample Size	Mean	SD	t-Value	Sig.(2-tailed)
PSC	Males	30	61.3448	8.09442	-0.845	0.402
	Females	30	59.8710	5.19450	-0.845	0.402

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$  \*\* $p < 0.01$  \* $p < 0.05$

Table 1.2 shows the comparison of personal self-concept among male and female young adults. It indicates the sample size, mean, SD, t-value and significance (two-tailed). The sample size of males and females was 30. Males had a mean of 61.3448 with SD of 8.09442 while females had a mean score of 59.8710 with SD of 5.19450. The t-value was -0.845 at significance of 0.402 > 0.05.

From Table 1.2, it is evident that the significance value 0.402 > 0.05. This implies that there is no significant difference in personal self-concept between the genders. Hypothesis 2 stands accepted. This could be because of the increased gender equality, changing gender

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roles and expectations. Advances in gender equality and women's empowerment have led to more similar opportunities, experiences and expectations for men and women, potentially resulting in similar self-concepts.

Table 1.3 shows the relationship between perceived discrimination and personal self-concept among young adults. It indicates the Pearson correlation, significance (two-tailed), and the sample size, N.

**Table 1.3**

		<b>PD</b>	<b>PSC</b>
<b>PD</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.176
	Sig.(2-tailed)		-0.179
	N	60	60
<b>PSC</b>	Pearson Correlation	-0.176	1
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.179	
	N	60	60

*\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

The correlation is -0.176 with a significance of -0.179 for the sample of 60 young adults.

From Table 1.3, it is evident that there is no statistically significant correlation between the variables. Therefore, it may be concluded that there is no significant relationship between perceived discrimination and personal self-concept among young adults. Hypothesis 1 stands accepted. It is seen from the table that the mean scores of males and females are similar indicating that there is not much difference between perceived discrimination and personal self-concept. This could be because of various underlying factors including the complexity of relationship between perceived discrimination and personal self-concept which include multifaceted constructs like social support, coping mechanism and socio-economic background. There is a need for more research in this area due to the lack of qualitative or quantitative literature in this area of study.

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY**

The fundamental implication of the study was to assess perceived discrimination and personal self-concept among young adults. The results and discussions of the study provide with us with an overview of the impact of perceived discrimination on personal self – concept. It is especially important to know the relationship between perceived discrimination and personal self-concept when it comes to a transitional period that is, young adulthood. The study also highlights the effects of the variables among the genders male and female young adults. It emphasises the importance of gender equality and woman empowerment to develop a healthy generation.

#### **Limitations of the study**

In the present study, only a limited sample size was included, future studies can be done on large sample sizes. The present study also only focused on young adults, next time it should be broader to other populations too. Analysis of the research was limited to t-test and correlation. The primary flaw in this study was the use of Google Forms to gather data rather than in-person interviews.

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### *Scope for Further Research*

- The study could be conducted on a larger population to get a much more accurate analysis. Further study may consider different age groups. An equal representation of participants from different states of the country can render better results.
- Examine the differential impact of various types of discrimination on personal self-concept among male and female young adults.
- Compare and contrast the effects of discrimination among different socioeconomic status or underprivileged communities.
- Overall, this topic constitutes a vast field with a significant research gap and therefore, it has notable research potential.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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