

Research Paper

## Impulsive Behaviour, Self-Control, and Well-Being Among Adolescents

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### ABSTRACT

Adolescence marks a period of rapid neurodevelopment and emotional change when executive functions, such as impulse regulation and goal-directed behaviour, plays a vital role in shaping mental health outcomes. Deficits in executive functioning are closely linked to increased impulsivity and are present across a range of psychopathologies. This study examines impulsive behaviour, self-control, and well-being among adolescents. The aim is to understand their relationships, the impact of impulsive behaviour on overall well being, and the influence of socio economic status on these constructs, including gender differences. The methodology involved a sample of 60 adolescents, evenly split between males and females, aged 12 to 18, from diverse socio economic backgrounds (middle and low SES). Three tools were employed: the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule - Short Form (PANAS-SF), the Brief Self-Control Scale (BSCS), and the UPPS-P Impulsive Behaviour Scale. Data was collected offline using standardized questionnaires. Impulsivity and self-control have a significant negative association, according to statistical analysis ( $r = -.570$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Participants from lower socioeconomic backgrounds reported considerably lower levels of impulsivity ( $t = 2.015$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and self-control ( $t = 2.887$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than those from middle socioeconomic backgrounds. Negative affect shows a moderate negative correlation with self-control ( $r = -.473$ ,  $p < .01$ ), while positive affect correlated weakly but significantly with impulsivity ( $r = -.265$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Gender differences were minimal, with only slight variations in emotional affect between males and females. The findings show a moderately significant negative correlation between impulsivity and self-control. There was a slightly negative correlation between negative affect and self-control, and a small but significant positive correlation between positive affect and impulsivity. Significant gender differences were observed in positive affect, with females reporting slightly higher levels, though overall gender effects on impulsivity and self-control were minimal. Interestingly, individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds exhibited significantly higher self-control and lower impulsivity compared to those from middle socioeconomic backgrounds. Emotional affect remained similar across socio-economic statuses. The findings reveal that the role of self-control

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enhances mental well-being and reduces impulsivity and negative emotions. Self-control plays a crucial role by acting as a factor which protects against impulsivity among adolescents.

**Keywords:** *Impulsive Behaviour, Self Control, Well Being, Adolescents, Socio Economic Backgrounds, Gender Differences*

Adolescence is often described as a time of exploration, growth, and change - but it is also a period marked by risk-taking, emotional intensity, and struggles with self-regulation. Two concepts are particularly important for understanding these experiences: impulsivity and self-control. Both have long been central in psychology, with impulsivity recognized as a feature of several mental disorders in the *DSM* and *ICD*. Yet even after decades of research, scholars continue to debate what impulsivity really means, how it should be measured, and what role it plays in shaping well-being.

Impulsivity is not a single, simple trait. Early personality theorists such as Eysenck described it as “a tendency for unplanned, risky behaviours, characterized by rapid decision-making and a lack of forethought or planning”. Dickman later made an important distinction between *functional impulsivity*-quick decision-making that can be adaptive-and *dysfunctional impulsivity*, where individuals act with too little thought and too much risk. Barratt’s influential model broke impulsivity into three components: acting without thinking (motor), making decisions too quickly (cognitive), and failing to plan ahead (non-planning). Other researchers have echoed these ideas, defining impulsivity as a hasty reaction when a more deliberate response would be wiser. Beyond personality, neuropsychological views describe impulsivity as difficulty inhibiting harmful urges, while cognitive perspectives see it as a breakdown of executive control. Social learning accounts add yet another layer, suggesting that children may learn impulsive patterns within their families if quick actions are consistently rewarded. Across these perspectives, a common theme emerges: impulsivity limits ability to pause, reflect, and anticipate impact of one’s own choices.

On the other hand, self-control is widely celebrated as one of the most adaptive psychological strengths. It involves the ability to resist impulses, stay focused, and work toward longer-term goals even when temptations or distractions arise. Within self-regulation theories, for individuals to adjust their behaviour, along with their personal values and expectations, self-control acts as a core process (Carver & Scheier, 1982). Research consistently highlights its benefits. Self-control-driven children become healthier, more successful, and better-adjusted adults (Moffitt et al., 2011). Self-controlled adolescents are more capable of maintaining stronger interpersonal relationships (Vohs et al., 2011), focusing and controlling their behaviour (Shoda et al., 1990), and achieving higher grades (Tangney et al., 2004; Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). Additionally, higher levels of life satisfaction and happiness is linked to self-control (Cheung et al., 2014; Hofmann et al., 2014). On the other hand, low self-control has been associated with procrastination, bad eating habits, impulsive spending, and financial troubles (Baumeister, 2002; Elfhag & Morey, 2008; Gathergood, 2012; Tice & Baumeister, 1997).

Adolescence is a particularly critical period for studying these two constructs. Young people are still developing the brain regions responsible for planning and self-regulation, while also facing intense social pressures and a heightened drive for independence. This makes them especially vulnerable to acting impulsively, but also uniquely capable of strengthening self-control in ways that can shape their future well-being. Striking the right balance between

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impulsivity and self-control may determine whether adolescents engage in harmful risk-taking or channel their energy into healthier, more constructive pursuits.

Despite a rich body of various researches on impulsivity and self-control separately, much less is known about how the two interact to influence adolescent well-being. Existing studies are often fragmented, with inconsistent definitions and methods that make it difficult to build a unified picture. Filling this gap is important, since adolescence is when lifelong patterns of regulation and coping begin to take root.

The aim of the study is to investigate how impulsive behaviour, self-control, and adolescent well-being interact. It seeks to give a thorough knowledge on how self-control may protect against the risks of impulsivity by examining these ideas holistically.

### *Objectives*

1. To study the link between adolescent impulsive behaviour and self-control.
2. To evaluate how impulsive behaviour affects the overall well-being of adolescents.
3. To assess the impact of socio-economic status on impulsive behaviour and the overall well-being of adolescents.
4. To examine potential gender differences in the impulsive behaviour and the self-control, assessing the extent and nature of the differences.

### *Hypothesis*

- Hypothesis 1 (H1): Impulsive behaviour and self-control in adolescents are significantly correlated negatively; the more impulsive an adolescent is, the less self-control they exhibit.
- Hypothesis 2 (H2): Adolescents who exhibit more impulsive behaviour have lower overall well-being.
- Hypothesis 3a (H3a): Adolescents from the lower socio-economic status background exhibit higher impulsive behaviour compared to those from the higher socio-economic status background.
- Hypothesis 3b (H3b): Socio-economic status significantly influences the overall well-being of adolescents, with higher status associated with better well-being.
- Hypothesis 4a (H4a): Impulsive behaviour of adolescents differ significantly by gender.
- Hypothesis 4b (H4b): Self-control of adolescents differ significantly by gender.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Sample*

The sample for the present study consisted of **60 adolescents**. There were two groups of adolescents between the ages of **12 and 18 years**. The sample included **30 males** and **30 females**. Participants were selected from both **CBSE and government schools**. The children belonged to different socioeconomic classes, specifically **middle and low**. IBM SPSS Statistics was used to analyse the data (Version 29.0; IBM Corp., 2023).

### *Instruments*

**Three scales** were used in this study to measure the key variables: Impulsive behaviour, self-control, and well-being.

**1. The Impulsive Behaviour Scale (UPPS-P):** Developed by **Lynam, Smith, Whiteside, and Cyders (2006)**, the UPPS-P Impulsive Behaviour Scale is an updated version of the

UPPS Impulsive Behaviour Scale (**Whiteside & Lynam, 2001**). Together with other four routes evaluated in the original scale— **Sensation Seeking, Lack of Perseverance, Negative Urgency, and Lack of Premeditation**—this version evaluates **Positive Urgency**. There are **59 statements** in the questionnaire. The scale employs a **4-point rating system**, with 1 denoting "agree strongly," 2 "agree somewhat," 3 "disagree somewhat," and 4 "disagree strongly." **More impulsive behaviour** indicated by a **higher score**. Some items, though, are **scored in reverse**.

**Subscales and Scoring (R = Reverse-scored): Negative Urgency:** 12 items (all the items except item 1 is reversed here). 58(R), 53, 50(R), 44(R), 39(R), 34(R), 29(R), 22(R), 17(R), 12(R), 7(R), and 2(R) are the items. Eleven items (no items are reversed here) indicate a **Lack of Premeditation**. Items are 1, 6, 11, 16, 21, 28, 33, 38, 43, 48, 55. Ten items (two items are reversed here) for **Lack of Perseverance**. 47(R), 42, 37, 32, 27, 24, 19, 14, 9(R), 4 are the items. There are twelve items in the **Sensation Seeking** category, all of which are reversed. 56(R), 51(R), 46(R), 41(R), 36(R), 31(R), 26(R), 23(R), 18(R), 13(R), 8(R), 3(R) are the items for this list. 14 items indicate **Positive Urgency** (all items are reversed here). 59(R), 57(R), 54(R), 52(R), 49(R), 45(R), 40(R), 35(R), 30(R), 25(R), 20(R), 15(R), 10(R), 5(R) are the items.

**2. The Brief Self-Control Scale (BSCS):** A **13-item** self-control measure, the Brief Self-Control Scale (BSCS) was created by **Tangney et al. (2004) (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004)**. A 5-point Likert scale rating system is used, with 1 denoting "not at all like me" and 5 denoting "very much like me." Items are either **positively phrased (+)** or **negatively phrased (-)**. Negatively phrased items must be **reverse-scored**. **Positively Phrased Items (Not Reversed):** Items 1, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11. **Negatively Phrased Items (Reversed):** Items 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 12, 13.

**3. The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS-SF):** Both positive and negative affect are measured by the **20-item PANAS**, which was created by **Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988)**. A person's mood during a given time period is frequently evaluated using the Short Form (SF). On a **5-point Likert scale rating system**, with 1 denoting "very slightly or not at all", 2 denoting "a little", 3 denoting "moderately", 4 denoting "quite a bit", and 5 denoting "extremely", respondents rate how much of each emotion they had experienced over the previous week. Both the Negative Affect (NA) and the Positive Affect (PA) are separate scores on the scale. Both scores fall between **10 and 50**. The **sum of the scores on ten distinct items** is the Positive Affect Score. **More positive affect** is indicated by a **higher score**. 1, 3, 5, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, and 19 are PA items. The **sum of the scores on ten distinct items** is the Negative Affect Score. **Lower negative affect levels** are represented by **lower scores**. Items 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13, 15, 18, and 20 are classified as NA.

### ***Procedure***

Many CBSE as well as Government schools in Kerala were contacted for the process of data collection. The data was collected from adolescents aged 12 to 18 years through a questionnaire, which was administered in an offline setting. The relevant information was obtained using all the three instruments.

**RESULTS**

*Table No. 1: Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), Impulsive Behaviour Scale (UPPS-P), and Brief Self-Control Scale (BSCS) Correlations*

		BSCS	UPPS	PA	NA
BSCS	Pearson Correlation	1			
	p-value				
	Sample size	60			
UPPS-P	Pearson Correlation	-.570**	1		
	p-value	.000			
	Sample size	60	60		
PA	Pearson Correlation	.215	-.265*	1	
	p-value	.099	.040		
	Sample size	60	60	60	
NA	Pearson Correlation	-.473**	.388**	-.155	1
	p-value	.000	.002	.238	
	Sample size	60	60	60	60

*Table No. 2: Comparison of Male and Female Participants on BSCS, UPPS-P, PA, AND NA*

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t
BSCS	MALE	30	40.6333	7.87174	
	FEMALE	30	37.9667	8.15997	1.288
UPPS-P	MALE	30	143.23	19.865	
	FEMALE	30	142.77	22.226	0.086
PA	MALE	30	33.9333	7.37626	
	FEMALE	30	34.0333	7.04411	-0.054*
NA	MALE	30	25.8000	8.33935	
	FEMALE	30	30.1667	8.80863	-1.972

**Table No. 3: Comparison of Participants from Middle and Low Socioeconomic Status on BSCS, UPPS-P, Positive Affect (PA), and Negative Affect (NA)**

	SES	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t
	MSES	36	36.4667	8.54495	
BSCS	LSES	24	42.1333	6.52704	2.887**
	MSES	36	148.30	23.768	
UPPS-P	LSES	24	137.70	16.299	2.015*
	MSES	36	33.7667	7.27150	
PA	LSES	24	34.2000	7.14577	0.233
	MSES	36	27.7667	8.81489	
NA	LSES	24	28.2000	8.89944	0.189

According to the study's empirical data, impulsivity (UPPS-P) and self-control (BSCS) have a moderate but statistically significant correlation. This means that the more self-control someone has, the less impulsive they tend to be (and vice versa). There is weak but significant correlation between positive affect (PA) and impulsivity (UPPS-P). This implies that, although the relationship is weak, those who experience more happy emotions also have a tendency to be a bit more impulsive. The correlation between self-control (BSCS) and negative affect (NA) is negative and statistically significant but moderate. This means that the more often people feel negative emotions, the harder it is for them to control their impulses and behaviour. There is statistically significant gender differences in the part of positive affect. Females have slightly higher positive affect than males. There is a trend suggesting that females report higher negative affect than males, but this result is only marginally significant. Self-control is significantly higher among individuals who come from lower socioeconomic statuses than among those from middle socioeconomic statuses. The impulsivity of individuals who come from middle socioeconomic statuses is significantly higher than that of individuals from lower socioeconomic statuses.

## DISCUSSION

The results support the idea that self-control is essential for mental health because it lessens impulsivity and negative emotions. Developing stronger self-regulation skills can lead to better decision-making, emotional stability, and overall life satisfaction. There is a statistically significant but practically negligible difference in positive emotions in males and females. While females tend to report slightly higher negative affect, gender is not a definitive predictor. There is no strong evidence that males or females have better self-control. Additionally, there is no strong evidence that males or females are more impulsive. This study presents an interesting contrast where low socioeconomic status individuals show higher self-control and lower impulsivity, contradicting common stereotypes. However, emotional affect remains similar across socioeconomic status levels, suggesting that happiness and stress might not be directly tied to financial or social standing.

## CONCLUSION

The study underscores the vital role by self-control in enhancing mental well-being by reducing impulsivity and negative emotions. Gender differences in emotional affect were minimal, with no strong evidence suggesting one gender has superior self-control or impulsivity. Surprisingly, lower socioeconomic status individuals exhibited higher self-control and lower impulsivity, challenging common stereotypes, while emotional well-being remained similar across socioeconomic groups. These findings highlight the need for interventions that foster self-regulation skills across diverse populations. Future research should explore underlying factors influencing these patterns.

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***Conflict of Interest***

The authors of this research state that they have no conflicts of interest with regard to its publication.

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