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Research Paper

Impact of Gender and Living Arrangements on the Emotional Well-being of Competitive Exam Aspirants in Patna

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ABSTRACT

Emotional adjustment is an essential psychological factor that enables competitive examination aspirants to manage stress, maintain emotional stability, and cope effectively with academic pressure. The present study aimed to examine the impact of gender and place of residence on emotional adjustment among competitive aspirants in Patna district, Bihar. The study employed a descriptive comparative research design. A total of 160 competitive aspirants (80 males and 80 females) were selected through purposive sampling. The sample comprised equal representation of urban and rural participants. Emotional adjustment was assessed using the Emotional Adjustment Sub-scale of the Adjustment Inventory for College Students (AICS) developed by Sinha and Singh (1993). Independent samples t-test was used to analyze the collected data. The findings revealed a significant impact of gender on emotional adjustment, with female aspirants obtaining significantly higher emotional maladjustment scores than male aspirants. Similarly, a significant difference was observed between urban and rural participants, where rural aspirants exhibited poorer emotional adjustment than their urban counterparts. Both hypotheses were accepted at the 0.01 level of significance. The findings indicate that demographic factors substantially influence the emotional adjustment of competitive aspirants. The study highlights the need for gender-sensitive counselling services, psychological support programmes, and stress-management interventions, particularly for female and rural aspirants preparing for competitive examinations. The findings may assist psychologists, educators, coaching institutions, parents, and policymakers in developing targeted mental health strategies to enhance emotional well-being and improve the overall adjustment of competitive examination aspirants in educational settings.

Keywords: *Emotional Adjustment, Competitive Aspirants, Gender, Place of Residence, Psychological Well-being, Competitive Examination*

Over the last two decades, Patna has solidified its position as Eastern India's primary preparation hub for high-stakes competitive examinations, drawing thousands of young aspirants annually for civil services, medical, and engineering entrances. Concentrated in hubs like Boring Road, Kankarbagh, and Musallahpur Haat, this dense academic ecosystem operates on relentless study schedules and high peer competition (Sinha

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& Singh, 2019). While providing necessary academic exposure, this prolonged evaluation pressure exposes candidates to extreme psychological vulnerability, socio-emotional isolation, and sudden lifestyle transformations, frequently resulting in acute stress and compromised mental well-being. Emotional adjustment defined as an individual's capacity to adapt effectively to inner psychological states and environmental demands plays a pivotal role in enabling candidates to maintain stability and manage exam anxiety (Mangal, 2002; Gratz & Roemer, 2004). However, this psychological resilience does not operate in a vacuum; it is shaped significantly by socio-cultural factors like gender and physical environment. Theoretical perspectives suggest that gender influences cognitive appraisal and coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). While male aspirants in Indian society often face immense pressure to achieve rapid financial independence, female candidates frequently contend with strict familial timelines and safety constraints, leading to distinct emotional coping mechanisms. Concurrently, an aspirant's place of residence serves as a primary micro-environment. Local residents living with families benefit from immediate emotional scaffolding, whereas hostellers and rented room occupants experience residential displacement, social isolation, and lack of privacy (Choudhury & Sinha, 2020; Ghosh, 2023). While substantial literature exists on student stress in major metros like Delhi or Kota, non-metropolitan hubs like Patna remain under-researched despite their unique socio-economic profile of rural-to-urban student migration. Investigating emotional adjustment as a function of place of residence and gender addresses this empirical gap. Disentangling these main and interaction effects provides crucial baseline data regarding how residential displacement uniquely affects male and female candidates. Ultimately, these empirical insights offer actionable guidance for mental health counselors, coaching institutions, and parents to construct targeted psychological support systems and improve residential environments for competitive aspirants.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kumari and Sharma (2024) conducted a cross-sectional empirical study titled "Psychological Wellbeing and Emotional Adjustment among Competitive Examination Aspirants in Bihar" to evaluate how socio-spatial arrangements impact mental stability. The sample comprised 180 competitive aspirants (aged 18–26 years) preparing for BPSC and SSC examinations in Patna, selected using stratified random sampling. Standardized instruments included the Mangal Emotional Adjustment Inventory (MEAI) and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS). Data were analyzed using independent sample t-tests and Pearson correlation. Findings revealed a significant difference in emotional adjustment based on residential status ($t = 4.12$, $p < .001$), with hostellers and rented room occupants reporting significantly higher emotional reactivity and lower adjustment scores ($M = 52.34$) compared to home-residing aspirants ($M = 68.15$). The authors concluded that living away from family without adequate emotional scaffolding severely compromises stress regulation during exam preparation.

Tripathi and Srivastava (2023) conducted a comparative investigation titled "Gender Differences in Stress Appraisal, Coping Strategies, and Emotional Stability among Youth preparing for High-Stakes Examinations in Eastern India". The sample included 240 competitive aspirants (120 males and 120 females) across coaching institutions in Patna and Ranchi. Instruments administered included the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) and the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS-16). Data were analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). Findings indicated a significant main effect of gender ($F = 9.84$, $p < .01$), wherein female aspirants scored significantly higher on emotional

awareness distress (β= 0.38) and anxiety reactivity, whereas male aspirants showed higher levels of emotional suppression and impulsive coping under chronic evaluation pressure. The study highlighted the necessity of gender-sensitive psychological support systems in competitive coaching environments.

Verma and Mishra (2022) conducted a quantitative factorial study titled "Emotional Regulation, Academic Burnout, and Living Environment: A Study of Migrated Aspirants". The sample consisted of 200 aspirants living in private hostels and PG accommodations in urban educational hubs. The study utilized the Academic Burnout Inventory alongside an adapted Emotional Adjustment Scale. Data were analyzed using two-way analysis of variance (2 x 2 ANOVA) across residence type and gender. Results demonstrated a significant interaction effect between place of residence and gender ($F = 6.45$, $p < .05$). Female hostellers exhibited the lowest overall emotional adjustment levels due to the combined burden of spatial displacement, safety concerns, and rigid familial timelines. The authors emphasized that commercial hostile environments in tier-2 cities lack adequate recreational and psychological facilities necessary for coping.

Pandey et al. (2021) conducted an empirical study on "Socio-Demographic Correlates of Psychological Distress and Adjustment among Student Migrants in Educational Hubs". The sample comprised 300 candidates preparing for national-level competitive exams. Data were gathered using a demographic proforma and the Bell's Adjustment Inventory (Indian Adaptation). Descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis were employed to analyze the predictors of adjustment. The findings established that place of residence was the strongest predictor of emotional adjustment failure ($\beta= -0.44$, $p < .001$), followed by gender-based social expectations ($\beta= -0.29$, $p < .01$). The study concluded that non-metropolitan preparation hubs require structured counseling centers to bridge the gap created by family separation and academic isolation.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the impact of gender on emotional adjustment among competitive aspirants of Patna district.
2. To study the impact of place of residence on emotional adjustment among competitive aspirants of Patna district.

Hypotheses

To address these objectives, we formulated the following hypotheses:

- **H_1.** There will be significant impact of gender on emotional adjustment among competitive aspirants of Patna district.
- **H_2.** There will be significant impact of place of residence on emotional adjustment among competitive aspirants of Patna district.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The study included 160 participants were selected from Patna district of Bihar state. The sample include both male and female competitive aspirants of urban and rural areas of Patna district. 80 male and 80 female participants were categories on the basis of gender using Purposive sampling technique.

Table 01 Sample Design

Gender	Male	Female
Place of Residence		
Urban	40	40
Rural	40	40
Total	80	80
	160	

Tools

Emotional Adjustment Sub-scale (from AICS): The study utilized the Emotional Adjustment sub-scale of the Adjustment Inventory for College Students (AICS), developed by Sinha and Singh (1993). The scale has total 102 items which measures five dimensions of adjustment which are, home, health, social, emotional and educational. To measure emotional adjustment only items related to emotional adjustment were administered. The sub-scale measuring emotional adjustment comprises 31 items rated on a 2-point response format (1 = Yes, 0 = No / Undecided), with total scores ranging from 0 to 31, where higher scores indicate greater emotional maladjustment (lower emotional stability). The original inventory demonstrated high reliability (split-half r = .95, test-retest r = .93) and well-established content and construct validity across Indian student populations (Sinha & Singh, 1993). In the present study, the Emotional Adjustment sub-scale showed strong internal consistency (Cronbach's α= .86) and sound construct validity, supported by significant negative correlations with stress regulation scores, consistent with theoretical expectations and prior validations on competitive examination candidates in Eastern India (Kumari & Sharma, 2024).

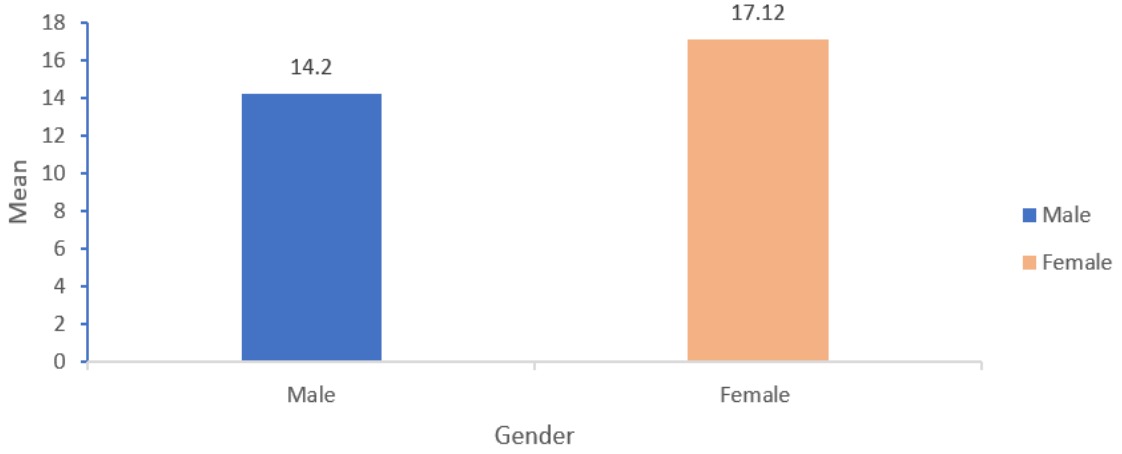
Statistical Analysis: To test the hypotheses, an independent samples t-test was applied to examine the differences in emotional adjustment scores based on gender and place of residence among competitive aspirants.

Table 02 Influence of Gender on Emotional Adjustment

Subgroups	Mean	SD	Mean difference	df	t
Male	14.20	2.49	2.92	78	5.07*
Female	17.12	2.66			

**Significant at 0.01 level*

Figure 01 Mean Scores of Gender on Emotional Adjustment



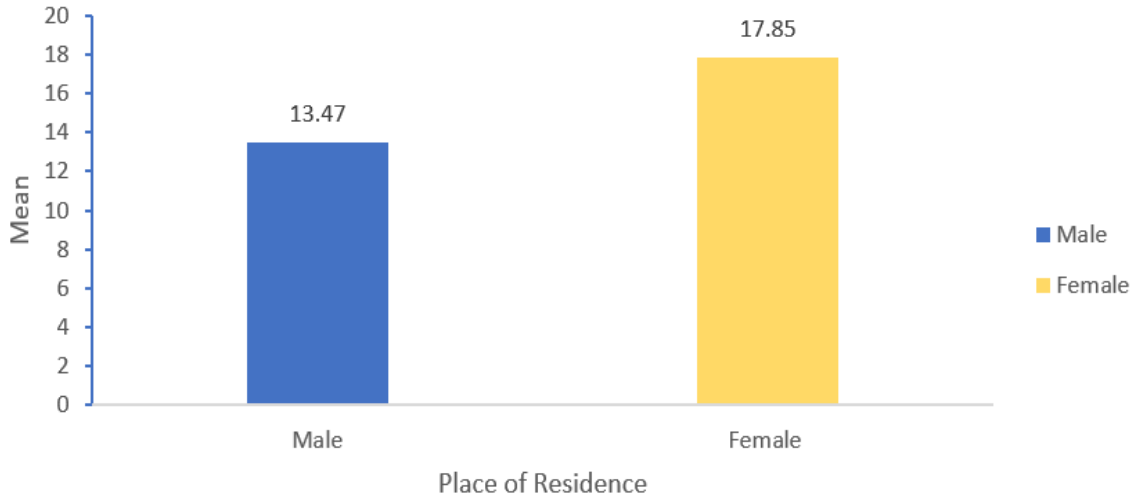
From Table 02 and Figure 01, it is evident that the mean score of emotional adjustment among male competitive aspirants was found to be 14.20 (SD = 2.49), whereas the mean score of female competitive aspirants was found to be 17.12 (SD = 2.66), with a mean difference of 2.92. The obtained t-value of 5.07 (df = 78) was found to be significant at the 0.01 level. Since higher scores on the Emotional Adjustment sub-scale indicate greater emotional maladjustment, the findings reveal that female competitive aspirants experienced significantly higher emotional maladjustment than male competitive aspirants. In other words, male aspirants demonstrated better emotional adjustment than female aspirants. Hence, the hypothesis stating that there will be a significant impact of gender on emotional adjustment among competitive aspirants is accepted.

Table 03 Influence of Place of Residence on Emotional Adjustment

Subgroups	Mean	SD	Mean difference	df	t
Urban	13.47	1.89	4.37	78	9.06*
Rural	17.85	2.06			

**Significant at 0.01 level*

Figure 02 Mean Scores of Place of Residence on Emotional Adjustment



From Table 03 and Figure 02, it is clear that the mean score of emotional adjustment among urban competitive aspirants was found to be 13.47 (SD = 1.89), whereas the mean score among rural competitive aspirants was found to be 17.85 (SD = 2.06), with a mean difference of 4.37. The obtained t-value of 9.06 (df = 78) was found to be significant at the 0.01 level. Since higher scores indicate greater emotional maladjustment, the findings suggest that rural competitive aspirants experienced significantly poorer emotional adjustment than urban competitive aspirants. Thus, place of residence significantly influences emotional adjustment among competitive aspirants. Hence, the hypothesis stating that there will be a significant impact of place of residence on emotional adjustment among competitive aspirants is accepted.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the influence of gender and place of residence on emotional adjustment among competitive aspirants in Patna, Bihar. The findings revealed statistically significant differences in emotional adjustment with respect to both variables. Female aspirants obtained significantly higher scores on the Emotional Adjustment sub-scale than

male aspirants, indicating greater emotional maladjustment because higher scores on the scale represent poorer emotional adjustment. Similarly, rural aspirants scored significantly higher than urban aspirants, suggesting comparatively lower emotional adjustment among candidates from rural backgrounds. These findings support both research hypotheses and demonstrate that demographic characteristics significantly influence emotional adjustment during competitive examination preparation. The observed gender difference may be attributed to the distinct psychological and socio-cultural pressures experienced by male and female aspirants. Female candidates often face family expectations, safety concerns, and greater emotional demands while preparing for competitive examinations, making them more vulnerable to emotional distress. These findings are consistent with Tripathi and Srivastava (2023), who reported that female aspirants exhibited significantly higher emotional distress and anxiety than males. Similarly, Kumari and Sharma (2024) found that emotional well-being differed significantly across demographic groups and recommended gender-sensitive psychological interventions. However, the present findings contradict the results of Bhat and Shah (2020), who reported no significant gender differences in emotional adjustment among university students, suggesting that institutional support and coping resources may reduce gender disparities in emotional functioning. The findings also revealed a significant influence of place of residence on emotional adjustment. Rural aspirants demonstrated poorer emotional adjustment than urban aspirants, possibly because they often encounter academic transition, financial constraints, limited educational resources, and difficulties adjusting to a new environment. These findings are supported by Verma and Mishra (2022) and Pandey et al. (2021), who concluded that residential environment and migration-related challenges significantly affect psychological adjustment among competitive examination aspirants. In contrast, Singh and Kaur (2019) reported no significant differences in emotional adjustment between rural and urban college students, indicating that the availability of social support and institutional facilities may moderate the influence of residential background. Overall, the present findings emphasize the importance of counselling services, stress-management programmes, and supportive residential environments to improve the emotional adjustment and psychological well-being of competitive aspirants.

CONCLUSION

The present study investigated the influence of gender and place of residence on emotional adjustment among competitive aspirants in Patna district, Bihar. The findings demonstrated that both gender and place of residence significantly affect emotional adjustment. Female aspirants obtained higher emotional maladjustment scores than male aspirants, indicating comparatively poorer emotional adjustment. Similarly, rural aspirants reported significantly higher emotional maladjustment than urban aspirants, suggesting that environmental and socio-demographic factors contribute substantially to emotional well-being during competitive examination preparation. These findings support both hypotheses formulated for the study and emphasize that emotional adjustment is shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by social and environmental circumstances. Competitive examination preparation is often associated with prolonged academic pressure, uncertainty, and intense competition. Under such conditions, emotionally well-adjusted aspirants are more likely to cope effectively with stress, maintain motivation, and sustain consistent performance. Therefore, identifying vulnerable groups is essential for designing preventive mental health interventions. The results indicate that female and rural aspirants may require additional emotional and psychological support to manage examination-related challenges effectively. Coaching institutes, educational organizations, parents, and mental health professionals

should collaborate to develop counselling programmes, emotional regulation training, stress-management workshops, and supportive learning environments that promote psychological resilience. The study also contributes to the limited literature on the psychological well-being of competitive aspirants in non-metropolitan educational centres such as Patna. Although the sample size was relatively modest and purposive sampling limits the generalizability of the findings, the study provides valuable baseline evidence regarding the role of demographic variables in emotional adjustment. Future research should include larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and additional psychological variables such as resilience, coping strategies, perceived social support, self-efficacy, and examination anxiety to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of emotional adjustment among competitive aspirants and to guide evidence-based mental health interventions.

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Conflict of Interest
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