
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Assertiveness, self-esteem, academic achievement and stress among adolescents: A Study of central and northern India

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: One of the very imperative personal attribute is to be able to advocate yourself- your own positions to accomplish objectives, to overcome difficulties, to be determined, but without violating the rights of others and the ability to control the aggressive impulses. The notion which expresses these personal characteristics is called "assertiveness". Being ingredient of the personal potential, it is a prerequisite for enhancing self-esteem, academic achievement and for diminution of stress. With this standpoint, this study was conducted to compare assertiveness, self-esteem, stress and academic achievement of adolescents selected from two different cultural backgrounds of Kashmir and Madhya Pradesh.

METHODOLOGY:

Sample

360 students divided equally into three groups, i.e. 120 Muslims from

Kashmir (60 boys & 60 girls), 120 Hindu (60 boys & 60 girls) and 120 Muslim adolescents of Madhya Pradesh within the age range of 12years -18 years were taken as participants.

Tools

Rathus assertiveness schedule, Rosenberg self-esteem, perceived stress scale, and academic achievement scale were used for data collection.

Statistical technique

Kruskal-Wallis Test was employed to analyze the data.

RESULT: On the basis of the religion, the findings of the study depicted a significant difference for the three groups namely Muslims of Kashmir, Hindus of Madhya Pradesh (M.P) and Muslims of M.P with reference to their self-esteem, stress and academic achievement. However, no significant difference was found in the assertiveness.

CONCLUSION: The findings of the study exhibit that religion plays an important role in determining the levels of self-esteem, stress and academic achievement

Key Words: Adolescence; Assertiveness; Self-esteem; Stress; Academic achievement

INTRODUCTION

Indian culture is known to be more collectivist and group-oriented with stringent values and norms, expecting an individual to conform to societal expectations. They have a unique culture based on values such as respect, humility, subservience, and following social or group norms. At the same time, India is a multi-religious society with people professing different religions living together. Though a large majority of people professes Hinduism, there are people in significant numbers, who profess other religions. About 20 percent of the people have faith in other religions such as Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism etc. These religious groups are termed as 'minorities' each being smaller in number as compared to the Hindu majority [1]. In India, the term religious minority is usually used to denote any religious community whose members tend to assert their distinctiveness in relation to the Hindu majority. While people are free to profess and preach their own faith, there are common cultural threads, which maintain social coherence and keep the society united.

By and large, Indians tend to live in fear of society and of being outcast by their own. 'What will others say' is a question that looms large in the Indian minds while stepping out of traditional boundaries or when making decisions different from the existing norms. Moreover elders with their age and experience are believed to be wiser and all-knowing and it is expected that the younger generation look up to them and learn from them. Questioning the long held beliefs and actions of elders or moving away from tradition is frowned upon and not encouraged. In this context, standing up for oneself and having independent opinions is not expected of an individual and may be thought of as a highly inappropriate act. Assertiveness is one such communication skill which involves expressing our views and opinions in an honest, straightforward manner without affecting the rights of others [2]. It involves standing up for oneself and believing that our opinions and rights are as important as anybody else's.

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Stress

In the absence of this skill, an individual may experience stress, anxiety in some social situations, which in turn, may affect his productivity. On the other hand, an assertive person is assumed to be able to deal with his life situations in a positive manner, which helps boost his self-confidence, self-esteem etc. Numerous studies comparing Indians and individuals from other nations have consistently found Indians to be significantly less assertive in their interactions and less outspoken about their views than their counterparts.

Self-esteem

Culture is a fundamental context that helps to shape both the individual and the environment. Self-esteem is a feeling of self-worth that is based on group memberships. A person's cultural background represents a powerful and pervasive set of environmental influences that may shape the expression, sources, and perhaps also the development of self-esteem [3]. Self-esteem is defined as an overall evaluation of your worth as a person, high or low, based on all the positive and negative self-perceptions that make up your self-concept. Harter stated that one third to one half of the adolescents struggle in the early adolescence due to low self-esteem.

Lack of self-esteem may lead to poor acquirement of the skills and abilities that are needed to achieve objectives and thus it in turn affects one's successful way of life. Low-self-esteem is also associated with feelings of being weak, helpless, hopeless, frightened, fragile, incomplete, worthless and inadequate [4]. They suffer from negative thoughts and fail to recognize their potential, they fear criticism and take compliments negatively and are afraid to take up responsibilities, and afraid of forming their own opinion.

Academic achievement

Academic Achievement can be described as successful accomplishment or performance in particular subject area or course usually by reasons of skills, hard work, scores or descriptive commentary [5]. In other words it refers to a student's success in meeting short or long term goals in education. Academic achievement as the extent to which a learner is profiting from instructions in a given area of learning i.e., achievement is reflected by the extent to which skill and knowledge has been imparted to him [6]. It also denotes the knowledge attained and skill developed in the school subject, usually designated by test scores, commonly measured by examinations. Conger and Peterson found that the academic achievement is related to certain aspects of personality [7]. The factors which influence academic achievement are general intelligence, study habits, socio-economic status, home environment, parental aspirations, school environment, and quality teaching.

There are many studies related to the academic achievement of adolescents. However there is dearth of studies comparing academic achievement of Muslims and non-Muslim adolescents. As Muslims being the largest minority of our country are backward educationally, socially and economically. It is equally important to conduct researches on Muslim students in addition to the non-Muslim sample. Therefore the present study has incorporated both Muslim students as well as non-Muslim students.

Stress

Stress is an unavoidable phenomenon in every aspects of human life. Nowadays, stress is not confined to adults alone but also affects children and adolescents. Seyle defines stress as any general bodily response to any demand [8]. It is a very uneasy feeling that we all go through in our life. The period of adolescence was well recognized as a period of 'stress and storm' [9]. Stress caused by feeling of insecurity and dependency can deplete physical and psychological buoyancy leading to many mental problems, this has happened in most cases of Jammu and Kashmir. Since last two decades the armed conflict, political uncertainty and unavoidable circumstances prevalent in the state of Jammu and Kashmir has a lasting and profound implication on the emotional, psychological, behavioral and other aspect of personality on the people of J&K. Moreover J&K has also been witnessing a conflict situation for more than 20 years. It needs a specific mention that the adolescents experiencing 'storm and stress' seemingly to be the most consistently affected and are at extreme risk of psychological trauma during armed conflict. Keeping these ideas in mind the present study was designed to examine the level of stress among the adolescents of Jammu and Kashmir.

On the other hand adolescents of Madhya Pradesh suffering from different kinds of stress and they don't have proper level of coping strategies. The main stresses are time concerns, classroom interactions, fear of failure and economic issues and some of the academic factors for stress in students [10]. Other than that, unlimited expectations of parents upon their children also make them stressed.

So from the above literature we have seen different studies have been done on the above discussed variables but none of the researcher tried to examine the difference between assertiveness, self-esteem, stress and academic achievement among two different cultures of India i.e. Kashmir and Madhya Pradesh.

Purpose of the study

The present investigation is undertaken with an aim to study the assertiveness, self-esteem, academic achievement and stress among Kashmir and Madhya Pradesh adolescents.

Objectives of the study

- To assess the level of assertiveness, self-esteem, academic achievement and stress among adolescents of Kashmir and Madhya Pradesh.
- To assess the level of assertiveness, self-esteem, academic achievement and stress among adolescents of Kashmir, and Madhya Pradesh with respect to their demography.

Hypotheses of the study

- There will be significant difference in the level of assertiveness, self-esteem, academic achievement and stress among Muslims of Kashmir, Muslims of M.P. and Hindu of Madhya Pradesh.
- There will be significant difference in the level of assertiveness, self-esteem, academic achievement and stress among adolescents of Kashmir and Madhya Pradesh with

respect to their State.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The present study consists of 360 students divided equally into three groups, i.e. 120 Muslims from Kashmir (60 boys & 60 girls), 120 Hindu (60 boys & 60 girls) and 120 were Muslim adolescents of Madhya Pradesh within the age range of 12 years-17 years were taken as participants.

Measures

To obtain data following measures were used for data collection
 The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule was used to study the assertiveness of adolescents. It is a standardized tool comprising 30 situational statements for which the subject is asked to rank the degree to which each statement is characteristic and descriptive of his/her behaviour (-3 to +3) yielding a total assertiveness score between -90 (least assertive) and +90 (most assertive). The tool was administered individually to each student and care was taken to see that the adolescents filled the questionnaire without discussing. There was no time limit for completion of the scale.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) developed by Rosenberg. It is a 10 item self report measure of self-esteem based upon satisfaction of one's self and life. The scale consists of five positive items and five negative items and need to be scored accordingly by reversing the value of either the positive or negative item responses. Typically, each item is answered on a four point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The internal Consistency ranges from .77 to .88 with test retest reliability ranges from 0.82 to 0.85. The scale ranges from 0-30. (0<15 low self-esteem), (15:25 within normal range of self-esteem), (+25 high self-esteem).

Academic achievement

This scale developed by Anderson measures academic adjustment of the student. This scale represents three components/ three dimensional construct of academic adjustment which is academic life style, academic achievement and academic motivation and it comprises 9 items. Responses are elicited on 5-point scale. The test-retest reliability of the academic adjustment is 0.84. With regard to the study, the researcher will apply the academic achievement dimension of the above said scale.

Perceived Stress Scale-10 item version developed by Cohen. It is a self-report scale designed to measure the perception of stress. The scale consists of 10-items; each item is answered on 5-point scale. In each item, students will be asked to indicate by circling how often you felt or thought a certain way. (Response values: 0=Never, 1=Almost never, 2=Sometimes, 3=Fairly often; 4=Very often). To score this measure, reverse the scores for the positively stated items (items 4, 5, 7, and 8), such that a score of 4 will become a score of 0, a score of 3 will become a score of 1, and so on. Next, sum the reverse-scored items with the remaining 6 items. Scores range from 0 to 40. The Reliability of PSS was 0.78 to 0.86. This scale has no diagnostic cut-offs. Higher scores correspond to a higher level of perceived stress.

Research design

In the present study the researcher used the Kruskal-Wallis Test to analyze the obtained data and Post-hoc test for pairwise comparison.

RESULT

Data analysis

TABLE 1

Kruskal Wallis Table

Chi-Square	Assertiveness	Self-esteem	Academic-achievement	Stress
Religion	1.33	10.41**	7.12*	48.01**
State	0.74	9.67**	2.76	32.45**

**Significant at .05 level and **significant at .01 level*

In the above Table 1, the findings depict a significant difference in self-esteem, academic-achievement and stress with respect to their religion but no significant difference on assertiveness. With regard to the state, results revealed a significant difference on self-esteem and stress but no difference on assertiveness and academic achievement.

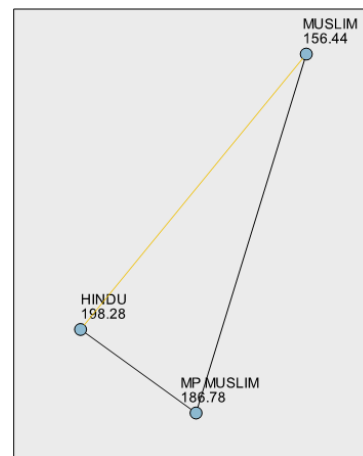


Figure 1) Pairwise comparison of self-esteem with religion

TABLE 2

Pairwise comparison of self-esteem with religion

Sample 1- Sample 2	Test Statistics	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistics	Si g.	Adj. Sig.
Muslim-MP Muslim	-30.346	13.402	-2.264	0.24	0.071
Muslim-Hindu	-41.842	13.402	-3.122	0.002	0.005
MP Muslim-Hindu	11.496	13.402	0.858	0.391	1

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05

From the above Figure 1 and Table 2 the results showed that the mean rank of Hindu (198.28) is higher as compared to mean rank of Muslim of Kashmir (156.44) which is significant at 0.05 level.

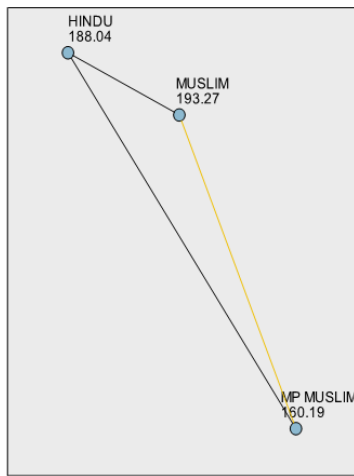


Figure 2) Pairwise comparison of academic achievement with religion

TABLE 3
Pairwise comparison of academic achievement with religion

Sample 1- Sample 2	Test Statistics	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistics	Si g.	Adj. Sig.
MP Muslim-Hindu	27.854	13.327	2.09	0.037	0.11
MP Muslim-Muslim	33.083	13.327	2.482	0.013	0.039
Hindu-Muslim	5.229	13.327	0.392	0.695	1

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05

While comparing with academic achievement the findings depicted that Muslims of Kashmir have higher mean rank (193.27) as compared to Muslims of M.P (150.19) which is significant at 0.05 level (Figure 2 and Table 3).

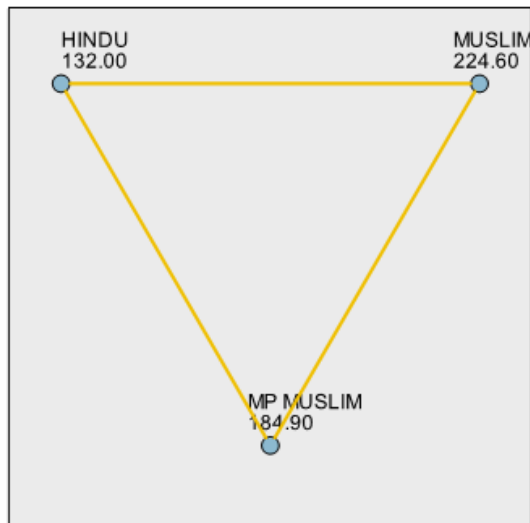


Figure 3) Pairwise comparison of stress with religion

TABLE 4
Pairwise comparison of stress with religion

Sample 1- Sample 2	Test Statistics	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistics	Si g.	Adj. Sig.
Hindu-MP Muslim	-52.904	13.411	-3.945	0	0
Hindu-Muslim	92.608	13.411	6.905	0	0
MP Muslim-Muslim	39.704	13.411	2.961	0.003	0.009

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05

In above Table 4 and Figure 3 Pairwise comparison of stress the findings revealed a significant difference among three groups as Muslims of Kashmir having higher stress (Mean rank, 224.60) as compared to Muslims of M.P (Mean rank, 189.90) and Hindu (Mean rank, 132.00)

DISCUSSION

Present research was done to examine the assertiveness, self-esteem, academic achievement and stress among adolescents with respect to their religion and state. It is evident from the findings that there is significant difference in self-esteem, academic-achievement and stress with respect to their religion but no significant difference on assertiveness among three groups. During the Pairwise comparison the findings showed that the (mean rank, 198.28) of Hindu on self-esteem is higher as compared to (mean rank, 156.44) of Muslims of Kashmir which is significant at 0.05 level.

Literature supported our findings that minority groups experience lower self-esteem than their dominant counterparts [11, 12]. Several authors also have suggested that minority group status is evidenced in lowered self-esteem [13, 14]. Early researches on relationship between minority status and self-evaluations reported that minority groups are often characterized as stigmatized and subjected to a variety of unpleasant experiences and they incline to have relatively more negative self-evaluations [15]. The other possible reasons for the above finding may be that the Kashmiri adolescents are facing the adjustment problems like parental dominance, social inferiorities, insecurity, lack of affiliation, isolation, ongoing violence etc. Infact Dumont & MA, found that problems in above areas will have an adverse effect on self-esteem and vice versa which may lead to many behavioral problems [16].

Moreover Muslims of Kashmir also show significantly higher academic achievement (Mean rank 193.27) as compared to Muslims of M.P (150.19). The possible reasons behind such findings are that the M.P Muslim adolescents have lower socio-economic status as compared to Kashmiri adolescents and the sample was taken from rural background. As Puju, reported in their findings that rural adolescents have lower academic achievement as compared to their counterparts [17]. There might be various factors that are responsible for the unsatisfactory academic performance of the students. These factors were lack of parents attention & control, poor performance of the teachers, ineffective administration, excessive power failure, lack of basic educational facilities, financial problems of the parents, domestic problems; poor availability of educational technology, and absenteeism etc.

In addition to that a significant difference was found among three groups as Muslims of Kashmir showed higher stress (Mean rank, 224.60) as compared to Muslims of M.P (Mean rank, 189.90) and Hindus (Mean rank, 132.00). The findings are supported by Majied & Khan, who reported that adolescents belonging to Kashmir region (considered to be high conflict region) show higher level of stress [18]. Infact stress caused by feeling of insecurity and dependency can deplete physical and psychological buoyancy leading to many mental problems in most cases of Jammu and Kashmir. Other researchers also reported Fitzpatrick et al; and Freeman et al that youth with higher levels of exposure to community violence (via incidence and/or severity) report significantly more distress than those with lower exposure [19, 20]. Infact mental health disorders, behaviour problems, somatic complaints, and impaired cognitive functioning were reported for adolescents living in violent conflicts [21, 22].

While discussing the results with respect to state the findings showed that there is a significant difference on self-esteem and stress but no difference on assertiveness and academic achievement. This may be attributed to highly competitive nature of the present academic pattern and M.P adolescents might have put more amounts of efforts toward developing self-esteem. On the other hand it might be because of differences in milieu and quality of life which influenced Kashmiri adolescents. In addition to that we might say that adjustment problems like Parental dominance, social inferiorities, insecurity, lack of affiliation, isolation, ongoing violence etc. have an adverse effect on their self-esteem. This difference between M.P and Kashmiri adolescents can be explained by a multifactorial reason that can be investigated in the future researches. Infact, Markus and Kitayama, reported that people from different cultures have remarkably different construal of the self [23]. Numerous other researchers also found that the members of disadvantaged groups, such as minorities are believed to have lower self-esteem [24, 25]. Gentry & Campbell, reported that most minority youth who differ from the dominant, experience some degree of struggle with self-esteem during adolescence [26]. These adolescents often face challenges to developing a healthy self-esteem based on gender stereotypes, ethnicity and related racism etc.

While discussing above findings it is clearly evident that adolescents from the Kashmir region were found to be more stressed than the adolescents living in Madhya Pradesh. The above findings are consistent with the report published by mental health experts of Srinagar revealing that there has been an uncontrollable increase in the number of stress in the Kashmir Valley [27]. This may be due to the fact that adolescents of Kashmir region have grown up in unpredictable and insecure conditions, facing constant threat to life, such circumstances are likely to exhaust the natural coping mechanisms of the individual thereby causing high levels of stress among them. Moreover Cohen and Eid, have also established that teenagers residing in the vicinity of terrorist attack have high levels of stress as compared to those living in vicinities with a low risk of attacks [28]. Schuster et al. have also noted that terrorist incidences

lead to decreased feeling of safety, and heightened perception of threat among the community members which in turn results in the increased level of stress among them [29]. The above finding is also supported by findings of the previous studies conducted by Summerfield; and Kimhi and Shamani reporting that population living under the threat of terrorism are most likely to develop symptoms of distress [30, 31].

CONCLUSION

The focus of this study was to compare assertiveness, self-esteem, stress and academic achievement of adolescents selected from Kashmir and Madhya Pradesh. Concluded based on the findings of this study that Hindu adolescents have higher self-esteem as compared to Muslim adolescents of Kashmir. On the other hand with respect to academic achievement, Muslim adolescents of Kashmir show significantly higher academic achievement as compared to Muslims of M.P. Moreover it was also evinced from the findings that Muslim adolescents of Kashmir show higher stress as compared to Hindu of M.P and Muslims of M.P. While concluding the findings with respect to state the findings showed that there is a significant difference on self-esteem and stress but no difference on assertiveness and academic achievement. The findings depicted that M.P adolescents have higher self-esteem and Kashmiri adolescents having higher stress.

From the above findings we come to conclude that there should be some preventive steps introduced in schools to overcome the academic problems of adolescents. Also, some intervention techniques like assertiveness training can be introduced especially in school setting for enhancing the level of self-esteem, academic achievement and to reduce the stress level of the students to the greater extent. Moreover, government should provide every avenue for the betterment of the adolescents of Kashmir and Madhya Pradesh.

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