

Emotional Intelligence, Conformity to Masculine Gender Norms and Help-Seeking Attitudes among Male Adolescents

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Mental Health issues in adolescent boys regarding their social identity and conformity to conventional roles of masculinity is something that has been studied very less in context to Indian population. Their emotional intelligence and attitude to seek help regarding mental health is a burning issue in the field of adolescent well-being. Present study was conducted on 161 adolescent boys (age range 13-19 years) in Uttar Pradesh, India to examine the relationship between Conformity to Masculine Gender Norms and Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help with Emotional Intelligence as a moderating variable. The data was collected using Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory, Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale, and Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale - Short Form. Obtained data was analysed using Pearson correlation and regression analysis. Results of the correlation indicate a significantly negative association between Conformity to Masculine Gender Norms and Attitudes towards Seeking of Professional Psychological Help. No moderating effect of Emotional Intelligence was found on the relationship of Conformity to Masculine Norms and Help Seeking Behaviours of adolescent boys.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Help Seeking Attitudes, Conformity to masculine gender norms, regression analysis, Indian Adolescents.

Adolescence is one of the most stressful periods of life. Not surprisingly, adolescents experience several psychological problems. Mental health conditions constitute a major burden of disease for adolescents globally. In 2019, it was estimated that one in seven adolescents experience mental disorders, which is estimated to be around 166 million adolescents (89 million boys and 77 million girls) globally, (World Children's Report 2021). However, studies show that the gap between adolescents who suffer from psychological problems and those who seek help for them is huge.

There is a general stigma around seeking help for psychological problems in India, which aggravates the situation. Only 41 per cent of young people in India said that it is good to seek support for mental health problems, compared to an average of 83 per cent for 21 countries (UNICEF, 2021). Additionally, out of 21 countries, India was the only country where a minority felt that people who battle mental health problems should seek support from others, compared to

20 countries, the percentage of people who felt that reaching out was the best option to tackle mental health problems ranged from 56 to 95 per cent. This is surprising, given that the number of young adults in India who suffer from mental disorders is quite large.

According to Hossain and Purohit (2019) 50 million children in India suffer from mental health issues, and 80 to 90 percent of those have not sought help. These figures are alarming, especially in the aftermath of COVID-19, which led to schools being closed for a long time, affecting the psychological well-being of children. Adolescents experienced acute and chronic stress because of parental anxiety, disruption of daily routines, increased family violence, and home confinement with little or no access to peers, teachers, or physical activity. Thus, it becomes imperative to study the factors which lead to help-seeking for psychological problems in adolescents, so that it can be increased and interventions can be implemented in earlier stages of mental disorders.

One of the most important factors which lead to help-seeking for psychological factors is help-seeking attitudes (Leaf et al., 1988). Several demographic and psychological factors influence help-seeking attitudes. Attitudes toward the use of mental health services were affected by the subjects' age, sex, race, education, and income (Leaf et al., 1987). There is repeated evidence that females have more positive attitudes toward help-seeking than males (Mackenzie et al., 2006, Addis & Mahalik, 2003). This is especially problematic given the fact that males are more likely to resort to substance abuse and commit suicide due to psychological problems (Kessler et al., 1994). There is a dearth of studies that explore the factors behind unfavourable help-seeking attitudes in males in India, and even fewer studies explore the problem among the Indian male adolescent population. Thus, it becomes necessary to understand the factors that lead to unfavourable help-seeking attitudes in males from different demographics to serve their counselling needs. The present study is an attempt to examine the relationship between conformity to masculine gender norms and help-seeking attitudes among male adolescents in India. This study also examines how this relationship is moderated by emotional intelligence in male adolescents.

Conformity to Masculine Gender Norms and Help-Seeking Attitudes

In the mental health context, help-seeking is an adaptive coping process that is the attempt to obtain external assistance to deal with a mental health concern (Rickwood & Bradford, 2012). The sources of seeking help can be formal or informal. According to the theory of planned behaviour, an individual's behaviour is influenced by the intention to perform, which depends on one's attitude toward the behaviour, perceived subjective norms, and behaviour control (Ajzen, 1991). Thus, negative attitudes toward help-seeking act as a major barrier to seeking help for psychological problems.

Mahalik (2003), defined conformity to masculine norms as "meeting societal expectations of what constitutes masculinity in one's public or private life." The conformity to traditional masculine norms has emerged

as a factor influencing men's attitudes towards psychological help. Men are expected to act tough in the dominant Western and Asian cultures. Displaying behaviour associated with vulnerability or weakness like asking for help is viewed negatively and avoided (Pederson & Vogel, 2007). The endorsement of traditional masculine norms in men has been associated with low relationship satisfaction, increased substance abuse, unfavourable attitudes towards seeking psychological help (Burn & Ward, 2005; Levant et al., 2011 & Liu et al., 2007). In a meta-analysis of studies on the relationships between conformity to masculine norms and mental health outcomes, conformity to masculine norms was modestly and unfavourably associated with mental health as well as moderately and unfavourably related to psychological help-seeking (Wong et al., 2016).

Emotional Intelligence and Help-Seeking Attitudes

Mayer and Salovey have described emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive and express emotions, to understand and use them, and to manage emotions so as to foster personal growth (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Mayer et al., 2001, 2004; Salovey & Grewal, 2005; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The concept of emotional intelligence was brought to the public by Daniel Goleman (Goleman, 1995). Higher emotional intelligence has been found to be correlated to lower psychological distress (Austen et al., 2005), moderately related to lower depression (Goldeberg, Matheson & Mantler, 2006; Mikolajczak, Luminet & Leroy, 2007) and strongly to lower anxiety (Mikolajczak, 2007). Similarly, high emotional intelligence has been moderately related to lower levels of negative affect or depression (Sousa Uva, Timary, Cortesi, Mikolajczak, Blicquy, & Luminet, 2010), mildly related to lower levels of anger, sadness, fear, jealousy, and shame (Mikolajczak et al., 2008). Thus, people who have high EI seem to be better at resisting psychological problems.

Ciarrochi and Deane (2003) discovered that adults who have high emotional competence have more positive attitudes towards seeking help for psychological problems. They also found this relationship to hold true for adolescents

(Ciarrochi & Deane, 2003). This creates an interesting question as to how emotional intelligence and help-seeking attitudes are related. The present study hypothesizes that emotional intelligence acts as a moderator between conformity to masculine norms and help-seeking attitudes. If the relationship holds, then teaching programs aimed at improving emotional intelligence could improve the help-seeking attitudes in male adolescents despite the influence of traditional masculine norms.

Conformity to Masculine Gender Norms and Emotional Intelligence

A study by Scott (2013) found a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and conformity to masculine gender norms. Men who confirmed more to masculine norms were more likely to have low EI. Men who conform to masculine norms, especially self-reliance and emotional control were significantly more likely to have low EI scores. Another study, by Zysberg and Moore (2017), also showed higher EI scores were negatively correlated with conformity to masculine norms. These studies highlight the positive relationship that exists between conformity to masculine gender norms and emotional intelligence. Our study explores the possible role of EI as a moderating factor in the relationship between conformity to masculine norms and help-seeking attitudes.

The Present Study

This study aims to understand the relationship between conformity to masculine norms and help-seeking attitudes in the context of the Indian male adolescent population to provide better counselling services to this population. It also aims to explore the role of emotional intelligence as a moderating factor in the relationship between conformity to masculine gender norms and attitudes towards help-seeking.

Method

Sample

Data was collected from 161 adolescent boys from Uttar Pradesh using purposive sampling technique. 110 boys studied in Senior Secondary and 51 boys studied in Secondary school. The mean age of the participants is 16.43 years. Consent to obtain data from adolescent

male students was taken from the participants as well as their respective educational institutions and parents.

Tools

Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory-22 (CMNI-22): It is a 22-item self-report questionnaire that measures levels of conformity to perceived masculine gender norms in society among males. It measures conformity under 11 dimensions: Winning, Emotional Control, Risk Taking, Violence, Dominance, Playboy, Self-Reliance, Primacy of Work, and Power over Women, Homophobia and Pursuit of Status. CMNI-22 is a shorter version of the 94-item Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI; Mahalik, Locke, et al., 2003). For all CMNI items, a 4-point multi-step response format is employed with anchor points ranging from strongly disagree (0) to strongly agree (3). Higher scores on the CMNI reflect greater conformity to norms of masculinity. The authors developed the 22-item version of the CMNI using the two highest loading items for each of the 11 factors from the original CMNI validation study. The abbreviated scale correlates at .92 with the full CMNI. Alpha reliability for the abbreviated scale was found to be 0.718 in the present study.

Attitudes Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale - Short Form (ATSPPHS-Sf): It is a 10-item self-report scale developed by Fischer & Farina (1995). It is used to measure the participant's attitude towards seeking professional psychological or mental health services. Items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (disagree) to 3 (agree). Half of the items are reverse scored so that a higher total score indicates more positive attitudes toward seeking mental health services like counselling, medications and therapy. Internal consistency across diverse populations has ranged from .79 to .85 (Kim & Omizo, 2003; Moore & Constantine, 2005; Pederson & Vogel, 2007). In this study, the coefficient alpha was found to be 0.688.

Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale: It is a 33-item self-report questionnaire developed by Schutte (1998). It requires the subject to rate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement on a five-point scale where

Strongly Agree = 5 and Strongly Disagree = 1. Factor analytic studies have proved that all the items load significantly on a single factor, which is known as overall EI. It can be further broken down into 4 dimensions: Perception of Emotions, Managing Self-Emotions, Managing Others' Emotions and Utilization of Emotions. In this study, it has demonstrated a high reliability (Alpha=0.812).

Procedure

All the psychometric devices were directly administered to the participant in their schools with the consent of the Principal. Data was obtained from the students through Google Forms and the survey was conducted ethically by maintaining the anonymity of the participants. After collection of data, the responses were scored according to the norms of each tool used. Thereafter, the data was analysed using SPSS to obtain the results.

Results

To examine the relationship between Conformity to masculine norms, Emotional intelligence and Attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help correlational analysis was performed and obtained result is recorded in table 1.

Table 1 show that Conformity to Masculine Norms is significantly and negatively correlated with Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help ($r = -2.17, P < 0.01$). No significant correlation was found between Emotional Intelligence and Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help. Conformity to Masculine Norms and Emotional Intelligence were also found to be not correlated significantly.

Moderated hierarchical regression analysis was performed to ascertain the moderating role of Emotional Intelligence in the relationship

Table 1: Mean, SD, Reliability Coefficient, and Correlations (N=161)

Variables	Mean	SD	Cronbach's Alpha	Correlation		
				1	2	3
1. Conformity to Masculine Norms	31.18	5.21	0.72	1		
2. Emotional Intelligence	124.37	12.03	0.81	.097	1	
3. Attitudes Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help	13.79	4.94	0.69	-.217**	.034	1

** $P < 0.01$

Tables 2: Summary of the results of Moderated Hierarchical Regression Analysis (N=161)

Variables	Dependent /Criterion Variable	
	Attitudes Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help	
Predictor/ Independent Variables	Step 1	Step 2
1. Conformity to Masculine Norms	-.223**	-.221**
2. Emotional Intelligence	.056	.060
Interaction Effect		
Conformity to Masculine Norms X Emotional Intelligence		.109
Overall R ²	.50	.062
R ² Change	.50	.012
F Change	4.181*	1.991

* $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$

Step 1: Degree of freedom (2, 158) , Step 2: Degree of freedom (1, 157)

Note: Standardized beta (β) is reported in table

between Conformity to Masculine norms and Attitude towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help. Attitude towards Seeking of Professional Psychological Help was entered in the dependent variable column. Predictor variables (Conformity to Masculine Norms and Emotional Intelligence) were entered in the first step of the model and the cross product of these two variables were entered in the step two of the model

Although, results conformed the causal relationship between Conformity to Masculine norms and Attitude towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help ($\beta = -0.223$; $P < 0.01$) but not indicate any significant moderating effect of emotional intelligence on the relationship of Conformity to Masculine Norms and Attitudes towards Seeking of Professional Psychological Help.

Discussion

The present study was aimed to establishing a relationship between the Conformity to Masculine Norms and Attitudes towards Seeking of Professional Psychological Help in adolescent boys of Uttar Pradesh, India. In this relationship, the moderating effect of Emotional Intelligence was also examined.

After analysis of the responses, it was found that there was a significant negative correlation between Conformity to Masculine Norms and Attitudes towards Seeking of Professional Psychological Help. This relationship suggests that higher the score of Conformity to Masculine Norms; lower the Attitude towards Professional Psychological Help-Seeking behaviour. Our result is similar to the previous studies (Wong, 2016; Burn & Ward, 2005), who reported unfavourable relations between the conformity levels of the sample and their professional psychological help-seeking behaviour. However, the present study could not establish a significant relationship between Emotional Intelligence of adolescent boys and their Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help.

The study did not find the significant relationship between the predictor variables too, i.e., Conformity to Masculine Norms and Emotional Intelligence of adolescent boys. This was a surprising result as previous studies

(Ciarrochi & Deane, 2003; Mikolajczak, 2008) show the existence of prominent relationships between these variables. In the present study, the data obtained measuring Emotional Intelligence of adolescent boys appear to have gone through a response bias, even though it shows high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81$). Parekh and Dalwai (2020) reported that the most common psychosocial and behavioral problems among children and adolescents in the pandemic were inattention, clinginess, distraction and fear of asking questions about the pandemic.

UNICEF (2021) conducted an assessment of 8,444 adolescents from nine countries between the ages of 13 and 29. The report gave an account of the feelings they faced in the first months of the pandemic and their reactions to the situation in September. A situation that generates deep concern and is a call to national health authorities is that even though 73% felt the need to ask for help concerning their physical and mental well-being, 40% out of this group did not ask for help. The main reason influencing their current emotions was the economic situation and the stress from the pandemic. Considering the data was collected in the turbulent times of the pandemic where adolescent students were going through so much, it might have affected their mental health in a way that it confounded the efficacy of their responses to the Schutte EI Self-report Inventory and ATSPPH (Sf).

A study on 'Stigma associated with mental health problems among young people in India', reported that one-third of young people display poor knowledge of mental health problems and negative attitudes towards people with mental health problems and one in five had intended stigmatizing behaviour (Gaiha, 2020). People with mental health problems are perceived as dangerous and irresponsible, likely due to misinformation and misunderstanding of mental health problems as being solely comprised of severe mental disorders (e.g., schizophrenia). However, psychiatric labels are not commonly understood. Globally, 20% of young people experience mental disorders. In India, only 7.3% of its 365 million youth report such problems (NMHS, Report 2015-16). The likelihood of Indian youth to accept professional

psychological help is something that our study aimed to find, but due to factors like pandemic and cultural stigma regarding mental health in our sample, the hypothesized results could not be obtained.

Limitations of the Present Study

A possible reason for the absence of relationship in the obtained data might be due to methodological limitations: the population to which they are distributed cannot be described, and respondents with biases may be included into the sample. Research is of value only when the findings from a sample can be generalized to a meaningful population. When the population addressed by the survey cannot be described and the sample is contaminated by respondents with biases, findings from online surveys cannot be generalized and may therefore mislead (Chittaranjan, 2020).

The sample size was also relatively small to derive any significant behaviour and cognitive patterns observed for generalization. The variables could be explored more by assessing their factors and its effect on the sample but could not be done due to absence of significant relationship. (Gaiha & Salisbury, 2020).

Application of Psychological tool which has been developed in western culture may be an imperfection of the study. Psyche of Indian youth may differ from thought pattern of western counterpart. Further use of short version of scale e.g., Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory-22 (CMNI-22) may be another limitation of the study

Recommendation and Future direction for the Research

Emotional Intelligence is one of the most important traits to function as a human being to co-exist in a society, especially Indian society which inhabits so many different cultures and subcultures. Therefore, assessment of EI of the various cultures and age groups in India would help the scholars to know more facets about this phenomenon.

Speaking of Indian society, which has been known for being 'male dominating', it is important to understand and define masculine gender norms and its positive and negative effects

through a detailed assessment of Conformity to Masculine Gender Norms. The researchers are recommended to use CMNI-94 for assessment as it is the more elaborate version of the scale used in this study. It is recommended to use a large sample of males including various sub categories like education, age, socio-economic background, geographical area etc. The dimensions of masculine gender norms are also very interesting to study and its correlation with other psychological factors (life satisfaction, self-esteem, neuroticism, stress etc.) could shed lighter on its relationship with these factors and its effect on the society.

Finally, in the current climate of our country where people are gradually getting aware of mental health facilities and are identifying the need to prioritize it, there is still a major faction of people who aren't able to overcome the stigma around mental health. This makes the assessment of Attitudes towards Professional Psychological Help-seeking, an urgent need to understand and improve the behaviour of Indian population around help seeking and mental health. It is recommended to use to full length scale of ATSPPH on both an urban as well as rural population to further analyse their respective responses in order to understand the root causes of such behaviours. Inclusion of culture as a controlled variable in such studies is very important as it affects the relationship that it being assessed in one way or another. There can be many factors that might be influencing or moderating help-seeking behaviours, researchers can pursue further to find such relationships by assessing such factors.

Conclusion

The present study signifies that high level of Conformity to Masculine Norms in the adolescent boys, leads to low level of Attitude to seek help for Mental health issues. While the study could not establish any significant role of Emotional Intelligence in Attitude towards Help Seeking behaviour. This study may help researcher to understand about the factors which affect Attitudes towards seeing help for mental health issues. This study will also help practitioners to develop a plan for 'how to overcome the stigma around mental health'.

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