

The Role of Socio-Economic Status and Social Relationship in Shaping the Assertiveness of Government School Adolescent Girl Students

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KEYWORDS

Adolescents, assertiveness, government school, bonding, peers, academic achievement

ABSTRACT

Adolescents constitute a significant demographic in India, accounting for approximately 20 per cent of the country's population. This critical life stage is marked by rapid physical, emotional, and social development, making it a pivotal period for building essential life skills such as assertiveness. For school-going adolescent girls, assertiveness is not only vital for fostering self-confidence and decision-making but also for navigating gendered societal expectations and peer dynamics. The researcher has aimed to find out the association between the socio economic conditions and assertiveness among the government school adolescent students and a cross-sectional research design was used. This study describes the relationship between familial bonding, communication with peers, teachers, academic performance and the assertiveness of school-going adolescent girls. Sample size is 60. The major findings of the study reveal that majority of the respondents had low level of assertiveness (61.7%) and parents income have a significant difference between shaping the assertiveness of adolescent girl students.

Introduction

Adolescence is a foundational period for developing the skills and behaviors that will shape adulthood, making it an essential phase for guidance, support, and healthy decision-making. Adolescents face pressure from their peer groups, therefore being aggressive is a crucial social skill. Adolescents may go through the situation in which there is less personal support and supervision (Mir Lashari et al, 2008). Teenagers are under a great deal of pressure because of the complexities and ambiguities of this transition, which might cause them to become more excited. This can occasionally manifest as sensitivity and high enthusiasm. Many experts explain that during adolescent period, they experience more needs and conflicts that are associated with disagreeable behavioral responses (Maleki et al, 2011). Assertiveness is the quality of being self-assured and confident without being aggressive or submissive (Alberti & Emmons, 1982). Psychologists claim that developing assertiveness is a learned communication skill. It is characterized by a confident declaration of an opinion that protects an individual's rights without jeopardizing those of others. Those who are dynamic lead happier, more truthful, and less manipulative lives than those who are aggressive and submissive. According to Farrell et al., (2010) the school, friends, and parents all have a significant impact on the rise in violence during the early adolescent years. Attitudes from peers are crucial, particularly during the change from

the final grade of elementary school to the first year of high school. Teenagers may engage in conversations, arguments, and occasionally inappropriate behavior during this time to show that they are mature and to elevate their standing among their peers. People who lack confidence are usually helpless to alter their situation. This suggests that developing assertiveness early in adolescence could have significant benefits down the road. An increased awareness of one's own rights is facilitated by assertiveness training.

Family relationships play a central role in shaping the assertiveness of adolescent girls. Parental support, communication patterns, and emotional bonding within families significantly influence their ability to express opinions, set boundaries, and stand up for themselves. However, these dynamics often vary based on socio-cultural contexts and economic conditions, which may either nurture or hinder the development of assertiveness. This study aims to explore the interconnections between demographic characteristics, socioeconomic conditions, and assertiveness among adolescent girls. By examining these relationships, the study seeks to uncover the unique challenges faced by this demographic and highlight the critical need for interventions that foster assertiveness. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing targeted educational programs, policy frameworks, and family-based interventions that empower adolescent girls, improve their self-esteem, and enhance their overall quality of life.

Socio economic conditions and Assertiveness

Maheswari and Martin(2023) studied the repercussions of socioeconomic conditions and self concept among the adolescent school students and found that the socioeconomic factors such as parents education and income significantly influenced adolescents' self-concept, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to support adolescents from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Patel and Shah (2023) examined the effect of problem-solving and assertiveness training on self-esteem and mental health among adolescent girls and the findings of the study showed that there are significant increase in self-esteem and reduction in mental health issues in the intervention group and enhanced coping strategies and interpersonal skills were also observed. Maheswari and Martin (2022) assessed the self-concept levels among adolescents attending Government Higher Secondary School in Samayanallur in Madurai district. The findings underscore the importance of self-concept in adolescent development because the respondents had low level of self concept and socio economic factors played a vital role in influencing the self concept. Carter and Peterson (2021) found that girls from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often faced barriers to expressing assertiveness due to societal expectations and limited opportunities for self-expression.

Singh and Kaur (2022) found the effectiveness of assertiveness training on the levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among adolescent girls. Quasi-experimental design was applied with a sample of 100 adolescent girls aged 15–17 from urban schools in Mumbai, India. The results of the study explained that there was significant reduction in stress, anxiety, and depression levels in the experimental group and improved self-confidence and social interactions were reported. Kumar and Sharma (2021) revealed that due to training there was significant improvement in psychological well-being and assertiveness in the experimental group compared to the control group and reduction in anxiety and depression symptoms post-intervention. Gupta and Choudhary (2021) examined the assertive behavior and self-esteem among adolescent girls with a sample of 200 adolescent girls aged 14–16 from urban schools in Kolkata, India. The major findings of the study communicated that positive correlation is seen between assertiveness and self-esteem and higher assertiveness levels associated with better academic performance and social relationships. Lee and Kim (2019) revealed that in cultures where traditional gender roles

prevail, female students tend to show lower levels of assertiveness, which can impact their social and academic outcomes. Conversely, in more egalitarian societies, girls exhibited higher levels of assertiveness, contributing to stronger self-advocacy and social integration. Sharma and Verma (2019) found that urban adolescents, who generally come from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, were more likely to be assertive in expressing their needs and opinions, due to better access to education and resources. In contrast, rural adolescents, particularly those from lower SES, displayed lower assertiveness due to cultural norms, limited access to education, and fewer opportunities for personal growth. Smith and Carter (2018) found that higher levels of assertiveness were positively correlated with academic success, improved self-esteem, and better social skills. Assertive female students were more likely to advocate for themselves in school, which in turn contributed to better overall academic outcomes and healthier peer relationships. Thompson and Gill (2017) found that higher levels of assertiveness were negatively associated with social anxiety, meaning that girls who exhibited assertive behaviors were less likely to experience anxiety in social interactions. Mofrad and Mehrabi (2015) indicated that there was a negative association between aggression and assertiveness ($p < 0.003$) and also between assault and self-efficacy ($p < 0.001$). These reviews illustrate the significant impact of socioeconomic conditions on the development of assertiveness among Indian adolescents. They emphasize that socioeconomic background can influence how adolescents perceive themselves, their ability to communicate their needs, family relationship, their academic and social success. The findings of this research will contribute to addressing the gaps in the existing literature and provide actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and social workers to support the holistic development of adolescent girls in India, particularly in underprivileged communities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The researcher has aimed to find out the association between the socio economic conditions and assertiveness among the government school adolescent students and a cross-sectional research design was used. The main objectives of the study are to 1.) find out the socio-economic status of the respondents. 2.) describe the relationship of the respondents with their family members, peers and teachers. 3) analyze the assertiveness among the adolescent girls of government school and 4.) to assess the relationship between selected socio economic variables and assertiveness. The universe of the study comprises all the students studying 10th and 12th at Government Girls higher Secondary School, Manachanallur, Trichy and sixty adolescent girl students were selected using stratified proportional random sampling technique. Adolescents girls aged 15-17 years who were willing to participate were included in the study. Adolescents who were not present for time data collection were excluded. Students from 10th and 12th standard were selected randomly. Prior permissions were obtained from the school before starting the data collection process. Interview schedule method was used to do data collection.

Measures

Socio-demographic Variables

A self prepared interview schedule was prepared to collect the required data and the Socio-demographic variables includes age, gender, religion, father and mother's education, father and mother's occupation, year of study, family income, domicile, family type, and number of siblings, birth order, physical health status, relationship with parents, peers and teachers, academic performance and problems faced by the respondents.

Subject Variable

The researcher has used for Rathus Assertiveness tool for the study and the scale consisted of 30 items on a six-point scale ranging from (+3, very characteristic of me and -3, very uncharacteristic of me. Scoring (+45) on the scale is considered as mean value. A mean score and above indicates that the individual is high on assertiveness, while a score below the mean

indicates that the individual is low on assertiveness, as reported by Oladipo et al. (2012). This scale originally consists of 30 items with test-re test reliability of (0.78). The scale consists of items such as boldness, outspokenness, confidence, aggressive and the like. Before using this scale for actual data collection, the scale was tried out on randomly selected five female students.

Findings of the Study

Socio demographic characteristics of the respondents

From the present study it is understood that, majority of the respondents (60%) are 17 years old whereas 25 per cent are 16years and 15 per cent of them are 15 years of age. Equal number of respondents (50%each) were studying 10th and 12th standard. Regarding place of residence almost all (98.3%) the respondents hail from rural areas and only 1.7 per cent is from urban area. Majority of them (76.7%) are living in nuclear families and only 23.3 per cent are from joint families. When it comes to parents educational qualification, more than half of the respondents father are educated up to higher secondary whereas 23.4 per cent of them have completed only elementary school and 10 percent completed diploma and 15per cent completed under graduation. Majority of the respondents mother (60%) are educated up to higher secondary school and a sizeable portion of them (35%) have studied up to middle school and only 5 per cent have done graduation. Majority of them follow Hindu religion (87%), Christianity (7%) an Islam(6%)

Economic status of the respondents

The respondents' fathers occupy various jobs such as daily wagers (31.6%), agriculture (16.6%), travel agency, drivers(20%), technicians(10%), equal per cent (8.3%) are carpenters and cook and only 5 per cent are working as teachers. Regarding mother's occupation, equal numbers of the respondents (23.3% each) are doing agriculture and homemakers, equal number of them (13.3% each), work in shops and restaurants and only 5 per cent work in schools. Regarding the monthly income of the respondents, the respondents father (38.3%) earn Rs. 15001 to 20000 per month, 25 per cent earn up to Rs.10000, 21.7 per cent earn between Rs. 10001 to 15000 and 15 per cent of their monthly income is above 20000 rupees. The respondents mothers also work as most of the families are in rural areas and 35 per cent of them earn up to Rs.4000 per month , 23.3 per cent mother's monthly income is between Rs.4001 to 6000, whereas16.7 earn above Rs.6000 and 15 per cent earn Rs.6001 to 8000 as monthly income.

Relationships with parents, peers and teachers

When it comes to closeness with family members, the respondents have said that nearly half of them are close to their fathers (48.3%), with mothers (40%), siblings(10%) and 1.7 per cent with their grandparents. Regarding interaction with family members, majority of them (60%) had very cordial interaction pattern and 40 per cent of the respondents had cordial interaction with family members. More than half of the respondents (55%) have very cordial relation with parents, 41.7 of them had cordial relationship and 3.3 per cent had strained relationship with parents. Vast majority of the respondents (96.7%) had very good relationship with friends (peers) and 3.3 per cent said they do not have friends. Great majority of them (85%) share their happiness and problems with their friends only and 15 per cent of them do not share their problems with peers. Vast majority of the respondents (93.3%) have comfortable relationship with teachers and 6.7 are not so comfortable with their teachers. Regarding the class teacher treatment, majority of the respondents (80%) said that they pay attention, 16.7 per cent have said that their class teachers show in difference and 3.3 per cent of them ignore the students.

Academic Performance of the respondents

Majority of them (60%) do average performance and 18.3 per cent study very good and 21.7 per cent do poor academic performance in their studies. Vast majority of the respondents (91.7%) do not have difficult subjects and 8.3 per cent feel difficulty in subjects they study.

Findings related to assertiveness and selected independent variables.

It is evident from the study that, majority of the respondents(61.7%) have low level of assertiveness whereas 38.3 per cent have high level of assertiveness.

There is a significant difference between sharing problems with family members ($t = 2.697, P < 0.05$) and having friends($t = 2.422, P < 0.05$). However, there is no significant difference between age, domicile ($t = -.553, P > 0.05$), family type ($t = 0.836, P > 0.05$), problem with class teacher ($t = -1.666, P > 0.05$). There is a significant difference among the monthly income of mothers and assertiveness of the respondents ($F = 3.710, P < 0.05$) from the mean score it is clear that mother's earning more than rs,8000 per month definitely have an impact in shaping the assertiveness of adolescent girls. It is a motivation and support for the adolescent girls and gives confidence. There is a significant difference among the interaction pattern with their parents($F = 3.710, P < 0.05$) and from the mean score it is clear that respondents with cordial relationship with parents show higher level of assertiveness.

Table 1

The Karl Pearson Coefficient between age, family income and the level of assertiveness

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From the study it clear that mother's age has a high significant relationship with assertiveness of the respondents and she is the overall care taker of the family and moreover a significant negative correlation is seen between the mother's income and assertiveness. As mother's age and income increases assertiveness of girl children decreases. From the study it is revealed that

adolescent students coming rural areas, low socioeconomic status and studying in government schools, no friends, misunderstanding with teachers due to poor interaction pattern, poor academic performance will have low assertiveness and it can be improved by creating awareness and life skills training programmes, building healthy relationship with parents, peers and teachers and must avoid fear and loneliness. It is also interesting to note that mothers educational qualification and self reliance has motivated students and improves assertiveness.

Social Work Interventions

- Workshops and counseling sessions can be conducted for parents, focusing on active listening, validating emotions, positive reinforcement and offering constructive feedback.
- A peer support group must be established within the school environment, where adolescents are trained by social workers to mentor their peers in assertive communication, self-advocacy, social skills, deal with issues such as bullying, social anxiety, and self-respect.
- Social Workers can give training on group activities, video-based learning, and discussion sessions that simulate conflict scenarios, helping students practice assertive behaviors in real-time.
- Workshops designed to teach empathy, life skills and capacity building to teachers, parents and students must be conducted. These interventions encourage adolescent girls to understand their emotions, advocate for themselves, and develop compassion towards others.

Conclusion:

The study examining low assertiveness among girl students studying in government s higher secondary school from different socioeconomic backgrounds reveals several important insights into how socio-economic conditions influence the development of assertiveness and it can be attributed to a combination of cultural, familial, geographical and societal factors, limited access to resources, traditional gender norms, and reduced opportunities for personal development contribute significantly to this low assertiveness. It is crucial to recognize the role of socioeconomic factors in shaping the psychological and social development of adolescent girls. In conclusion, addressing the underlying socioeconomic status of parents and cultural barriers are essential for promoting assertiveness among adolescent girls from low socioeconomic backgrounds, contributing to their overall well-being, academic success, and social empowerment.

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