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Demographic predictors of sociopolitical consciousness among college youth

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Abstract

Sociopolitical consciousness empowers young individuals to recognise social inequalities and participate in activism. This research investigates the demographic factors influencing sociopolitical consciousness among college youth. The study included 325 college youth representing various backgrounds. Surveys were conducted to assess sociopolitical consciousness using a dedicated scale. The findings reveal notable differences in sociopolitical consciousness related to gender and religion, with females outperforming males. Additionally, youth of *Other Religions* show higher levels of consciousness than their *Hindu* counterparts. Moreover, unreserved caste youth demonstrate greater sociopolitical consciousness than reserved caste youth. However, no significant variations were observed among socioeconomic status groups regarding overall consciousness, although upper SES youth displayed superior problem-solving efficacy.

Keywords: Youth, sociopolitical consciousness, demographic factors

Introduction

Youth is generally recognised as the stage of life when individuals begin to take on new roles and responsibilities while exploring their interests and identities. This stage is characterised by a strong sense of idealism and a quest for meaning; developing youth reflect on their environment and engage in sophisticated moral reasoning (Fischer & Bidell, 1997; Kohlberg & Lickona, 1976) ^[8, 12]. During this phase, young people become conscious of the diverse values, beliefs, and ideologies around them. Their experiences and observations of social and political realities play a significant role in their sociopolitical development. According to Anyiwo *et al.* (2018) ^[2], sociopolitical development is the process through which youth recognise social, political, and economic inequalities, understand their social identities, and become active in activism. As they undergo this journey, young individuals develop analytical skills, enhance their emotional intelligence, and acquire the essential knowledge needed to initiate actions on social and political issues, allowing them to understand and challenge oppressive systems (Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003) ^[19]. The process of sociopolitical development unfolds in a cycle, starting with individuals who are initially oblivious to the oppressive structures in society, gradually recognising and understanding the injustices ingrained within the sociopolitical system. As a result, they adjust their behaviours to navigate daily life. Awareness of social, political, and economic justice eventually arises, culminating in active participation in efforts for social, political, and economic change and liberation (Watts & Abdul-Adil, 1998) ^[18].

To date, research on sociopolitical development has mostly focused on theoretical conceptualisations and modelling for the development of measurement. However, little effort has been made to examine these concepts in the context of young people's everyday lives (Baker & Brookins, 2014) ^[3]. This study aims to explore the importance of demographic factors in predicting the sociopolitical development of youth. Baker & Brookins (2014) ^[3] operationalised sociopolitical development by naming it *Sociopolitical Consciousness* and developed a scale to measure sociopolitical consciousness. This study uses the concept of sociopolitical consciousness operationalised by Baker & Brookins (2014) ^[3]. The *Sociopolitical Consciousness scale* consists of seven factors that include both individual and collective dimensions.

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The sociopolitical consciousness scale consists of seven cognitive dimensions: global belief in a just world, socio-political awareness, collective responsibility for the poor, belief in collective action, problem-solving efficacy, socio-political justice orientation (Equality and Right) and localised community efficacy. *Sociopolitical awareness* reflects the youth's current knowledge about political issues and current sociopolitical events. *Belief in collective action* pertains to sociopolitical change accomplished through collective effort. *Problem-solving efficacy* refers to the perception of individual capacity to solve problems independently. *Global belief in a just world* concerns youth perception and belief in fairness in society and institutions. *Collective responsibility for the poor* is the belief that the government and community have a responsibility to help unfortunate individuals living at a disadvantage. *Sociopolitical justice orientation* (Equality and Right) is the belief that all groups, particularly marginalised groups, must have the same rights as others. Lastly, *localised community efficacy* assesses how local entities address community/local problems through collective efforts.

Aim of the research: To study the demographic predictors of Sociopolitical Consciousness among college youth.

Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Females will have higher sociopolitical consciousness than males.

Hypothesis 2: Youth from *Other religions* will have higher sociopolitical consciousness than *Hindu* religion youth.

Hypothesis 3: Youth from *Reserved caste* will have higher sociopolitical consciousness than those from unreserved caste group.

Hypothesis 4: The *upper SES* group will have higher sociopolitical consciousness than the upper lower SES group.

Methodology:

Participants

Participants consisted of 325 youth enrolled in colleges of the University of Delhi. The original sample included 338 participants, and 13 data sheets were removed due to significant incompleteness. The participants ranged in age from 15 to 24 years ($M=19.12$, $SD = 1.23$). Of the 325 participants, 49.5% (161) were males, and 50.5% (164) were females. In terms of religion, 76.9% of the participants were Hindu, 18.2% Muslim, 2.2% Sikh, 0.9% Christian, 1.2% Buddhist, and 0.6% identified as Atheist. Thus, the distribution of participants concerning religion was uneven. Therefore, for this study, participants were categorised into

two broader categories: Hindu (76.9 %) and Other Religion (23.1%). "*Other Religion*" encompasses all the minority religions, including atheists. From the participants, 61.8% identified as unreserved caste, 24.6% as OBC, 12.6% as SC, and 0.9 % as ST. For this study, participants were regrouped into two main categories: 201 (61.8 %) participants in the Unreserved caste and 124 (38.2%) in the Reserved Caste, which includes OBC, SC and ST caste participants. Regarding Socioeconomic status, participants provided information on the education and occupation of the household head, as well as the family's monthly income. This resulted in 36% classified as Upper Class, 38.2% as Upper Middle, 17.2% as Lower Middle, and 8.6% as Upper Lower Class.

Measurement

The data for the study were collected using traditional paper-based testing. Participants responded to the survey items presented to them in the form of a booklet, which included: (1) an Informed consent form (2) Socio-Demographic Form, (3) Kuppaswamy Socioeconomic Status Scale (updated in 2017) by Singh, Sharma & Nagesh (2017) and (4) Sociopolitical Consciousness scale. The Sociopolitical Consciousness scale was developed by Baker and Brookins in 2014 (Baker & Brookins, 2014) [3]. This scale has 35 items that measure the dimensions of sociopolitical consciousness among the youth population. Respondents give their responses on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". A higher score on this scale indicates a higher level of sociopolitical consciousness. For the current study, the Cronbach's Alpha of the scale was 0.732.

Sampling procedure

Since the study was exploratory, the convenience sampling method was employed. Students aged 15 to 24 years were invited to participate. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they would not receive any personal benefits.

Result

Hypothesis 1: Females will have higher sociopolitical consciousness than males.

There was a significant difference in Sociopolitical Consciousness for Male ($M=122.53$, $SD=10.843$) and Female ($M=125.32$, $SD=12.066$); [$t(323) = -2.186$, $p<.05$]. This indicates that females demonstrate greater Sociopolitical Consciousness than males. Therefore, the hypothesis that females exhibit higher sociopolitical consciousness than males is accepted. However, no significant difference was found in the subdomains of the scale.

Table 1: Comparison of Male and Female on the Measure of Sociopolitical Consciousness and its subdomains

Measure	Gender				<i>t</i>
	Male ^a		Female ^b		
	M	SD	M	SD	
Sociopolitical Awareness	21.26	3.685	21.29	3.814	-.062
Global Belief in Just World	26.32	6.614	27.77	6.151	-1.449
Collective Responsibility for Poor	13.32	3.488	13.57	3.247	-.686
Equality and Right	21.86	3.229	22.12	3.513	-.707
Belief in Collective Action	19.83	3.036	20.21	2.981	-1.142
Localised Community Efficacy	8.82	2.345	8.95	2.113	-.531
Problem Solving Efficacy	11.14	2.102	11.41	1.993	-1.197
Sociopolitical Consciousness	122.53	10.843	125.32	12.066	-2.186*

^an=161, ^bn= 164, df =323, * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$

Hypothesis 2: Other religion youth will have higher sociopolitical consciousness than Hindu religion youth.

Table 2: Comparison of Hindu and Other Religion on the Measure of Sociopolitical Consciousness and its subdomains

Measure	Religion			<i>t</i>	
	Hindu ^a	Other Religion ^b			
	M	SD	M	SD	
Sociopolitical Awareness	21.20	3.810	21.51	3.535	-.613
Global Belief in Just World	26.62	6.216	28.48	6.894	-2.215*
Collective Responsibility for Poor	13.16	3.234	14.39	3.639	-2.788**
Equality and Right	21.96	3.310	22.09	3.595	-.300
Belief in Collective Action	19.82	3.080	20.69	2.676	-2.227*
Localised Community Efficacy	8.84	2.225	9.05	2.247	-.740
Problem Solving Efficacy	11.30	2.103	11.17	1.870	.484
Sociopolitical Consciousness	122.90	11.464	127.39	11.203	-2.186**

$n^a=250$, $n^b=75$, $df=323$, * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$

A significant difference in Sociopolitical Consciousness was observed between Hindu ($M=122.90$, $SD=11.464$) and *Other Religion* ($M=127.39$, $SD=11.203$); [$t(323) = -2.186$, $p<.01$]. This finding indicates that *Other Religion* youth exhibit a higher Sociopolitical Consciousness compared to Hindus, particularly regarding *global belief in just world*, for Hindus ($M=26.62$, $SD=6.216$) and *Other Religion* ($M=28.48$, $SD=6.894$); [$t(323) = -2.215$, $p<.05$]. Additionally, on *collective responsibility for poor* for Hindu ($M=13.16$, $SD=3.234$) and *Other Religion* ($M=14.39$, $SD=3.639$); [$t(323) = -2.788$, $p<.05$]. Lastly, for *on belief in collective action* for Hindu ($M=19.82$, $SD=3.080$) and *Other Religion* ($M=20.69$, $SD=2.676$); [$t(323) = -2.227$, $p<.05$]. Therefore, the hypothesis that *other religion* youth possess a higher sociopolitical consciousness than *Hindu* youth is accepted.

Hypothesis 3: Reserved caste youth will have higher sociopolitical consciousness than the unreserved caste group.

There was a significant difference in Sociopolitical Consciousness between Unreserved Caste ($M=125.01$, $SD=12.010$) and Reserved Caste ($M=122.20$, $SD=10.559$); [$t(323) = 2.142$, $p<.05$]. This result suggests that Unreserved Caste youth have higher Sociopolitical Consciousness than Reserved Caste youth, particularly regarding Global Belief in Just World for Unreserved Caste ($M=27.61$, $SD=6.653$) and Reserved Caste ($M=26.15$, $SD=5.927$); [$t(323) = 2.005$, $p<.05$]; about Belief in Collective Action for Unreserved Caste ($M=20.28$, $SD=2.916$) and Reserved Caste ($M=19.59$, $SD=3.121$); [$t(323) = 2.031$, $p<.05$] and on Problem-Solving Efficacy for Unreserved Caste ($M=11.46$, $SD=1.934$) and Reserved Caste ($M=10.97$, $SD=2.197$); [$t(323) = 2.127$, $p<.05$].

However, Reserved caste youth exhibit higher collective responsibility for the poor among Unreserved Caste ($M=13.15$, $SD=3.455$) and Reserved Caste ($M=13.93$, $SD=3.170$); [$t(323) = -2.034$, $p<.05$] than Unreserved Caste youth. Thus, the hypothesis that *Reserved caste* youth will have higher sociopolitical consciousness than the *Unreserved caste* youth stands partly rejected.

Table 3: Comparison of Unreserved and Reserved Caste on the Measure of Sociopolitical Consciousness and its subdomains

Measure	Class				<i>t</i>
	Unreserved ^a		Reserved ^b		
	M	SD	M	SD	
Sociopolitical Awareness	21.49	3.819	20.93	3.612	1.311
Global Belief in Just World	27.61	6.653	26.15	5.927	2.005*
Collective Responsibility for Poor	13.15	3.455	13.93	3.170	-2.034*
Equality and Right	22.22	3.376	21.61	3.346	1.590
Belief in Collective Action	20.28	2.916	19.59	3.121	2.031*
Localised Community Efficacy	8.80	2.108	9.03	2.306	-.928
Problem Solving Efficacy	11.46	1.934	10.97	2.197	2.127*
Sociopolitical Consciousness	125.01	12.010	122.20	10.559	2.142*

$n^a=251$, $n^b=124$, $df=323$, * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$

Hypothesis 4: Upper SES group will have higher sociopolitical consciousness than Upper Lower SES group. There was no significant difference in Sociopolitical Consciousness across the four SES conditions [$F(3, 321) = 1.109$, $p>.05$]. Upper SES ($M=125.15$, $SD=12.196$), Upper Middle SES ($M=123.91$, $SD=10.960$), Lower Middle SES ($M=121.78$, $SD=11.297$), and Upper Lower SES ($M=123.24$, $SD=11.661$) did not significantly differ from one another. This result suggests that youth from Upper SES, Upper Middle SES, Lower Middle SES, and

Upper Lower SES do not differ from each other. However, the four SES conditions vary in Problem-Solving Efficacy [$F(3, 321) = 3.048$, $p<.05$, $\eta^2=.028$]. Post hoc comparisons using Hochberg's GT2 test indicated that the mean score for the Upper SES condition ($M=11.62$, $SD=1.870$) was significantly different from the Lower Middle SES condition ($M=10.64$, $SD=2.460$). This finding suggests that Upper SES youth have higher Problem-Solving Efficacy than their Lower Middle SES counterparts.

Table 4: Comparison of participant's Socioeconomic Status on the Measure of Sociopolitical Consciousness and its subdomains

Measures	Upper SES ^a		Upper Middle SES ^b		Lower Middle SES ^c		Upper Lower SES ^d		F	η^2	Post hoc
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Sociopolitical Awareness	21.30	3.882	20.94	3.780	21.42	3.195	22.34	3.958	1.159	.011	
Global Belief in Just World	27.75	6.333	27.44	7.052	25.96	5.443	24.62	4.843	2.564	.023	
Collective Responsibility for Poor	13.09	3.264	13.34	3.436	13.98	3.142	14.31	3.762	1.579	.015	
Equality and Right	22.37	3.395	21.98	3.273	21.35	3.290	21.72	3.798	1.221	.011	
Belief in Collective Action	20.29	2.895	20.22	2.926	19.36	3.498	19.31	2.661	1.919	.018	
Localised Community Efficacy	8.74	2.078	8.81	2.357	9.07	2.292	9.48	2.115	1.054	.001	
Problem Solving Efficacy	11.62	1.870	11.19	2.007	10.64	2.460	11.45	1.844	3.048*	.028	U SES > LM SES
Sociopolitical Consciousness	125.15	12.196	123.91	10.96	121.78	11.29	123.24	11.66	1.109	.010	

n^a=117, n^b= 124, n^c= 55, n^d= 29, * p <0.05, ** p <0.01

Discussion

Research on sociopolitical consciousness has been primarily focused on marginalised groups, particularly black and Latino youth from low socioeconomic backgrounds facing oppressive conditions. These investigations demonstrate that a critical examination of society equips youth with clarity and motivation to engage in activism and related social movements (Bañales *et al.*, 2020; Clark & Seider, 2020; Diemer & Rapa, 2016b; Hope, Keels & Durkee, 2016) [4, 5, 14, 7, 10]. Findings from this study also indicate that marginalised groups tend to embrace sociopolitical consciousness ideals. For instance, female participants supported equal rights and opportunities for everyone. Similarly, religious minorities shared this viewpoint, cultivated by a strong sense of collectivism, especially regarding collective responsibility for the underprivileged and belief in collective action. This observation is consistent with earlier research indicating that Asian and African Americans (people of colour) exhibit higher collectivism than European Americans (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001) [6]. Such collectivist tendencies may stem from their past experiences of marginalisation and oppression, leading to the advantage of engaging together in social justice efforts. This trend likely contributes to the pronounced collectivism observed among religious minority youth.

Regarding caste, youth from unreserved castes exhibit higher sociopolitical consciousness than youth from reserved castes. However, their sociopolitical consciousness is limited because the youth from the reserved castes think more about collective responsibility toward the poor than their unreserved counterparts. This finding contradicts previous research, which indicated that marginalised youth (youth of colour) have higher sociopolitical consciousness compared to white Americans (Godfrey & Greyman, 2014; Thomas *et al.*, 2014) [9, 17]. The higher sociopolitical consciousness of unreserved caste youth can be attributed to their greater access to education and positions of influence in India (Aggarwal, Drèze & Gupta, 2015) [1], which enhances their understanding of the sociopolitical landscape. In contrast, reserved caste youth tend to have limited access to educational opportunities and positions of power, hindering their sociopolitical consciousness development (All India Survey on Higher Education 2018-19; Joshi & Malgan, 2017) [11]. Nonetheless, a scholarly debate continues regarding whether critical consciousness is the appropriate term for the heightened awareness and action among privileged groups. Scholars argue that effectively combating oppression requires individuals from privileged backgrounds to recognise the causes and consequences of their advantageous status and actively work to reject such privilege (Swalwell, 2013; Watts, Williams & Jagers, 2003)

[16, 19]. This allows privileged groups with sociopolitical consciousness to act as allies for the oppressed. Youth from higher socioeconomic status have more problem-solving efficacy than youth from lower socioeconomic status. Previous research indicates that youth from lower SES experience lower social support, which diminishes their sense of self-efficacy and optimism during the socialisation process, consequently undermining their problem-solving efficacy (Piko, Luszczynska & Fitzpatrick, 2013) [13].

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