WELL-BEING OF SCHEDULED CASTE STUDENTS IN RELATION TO DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLE

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Abstract

Human beings' physical, social, mental, financial conditions, and lifestyle are closely associated with their well-being. In recent years, well-being has been a focus of intense research attention. Well-being refers to an individual's cognitive and affective evaluation of their life (Diener, Oishi & Lucas, 2002) and is often used as a technical term for happiness and quality of life. The more satisfied an individual is with their life, the happier they are. In psychology, well-being is studied through two main approaches: the hedonic approach, which focuses on happiness, and the eudaimonic approach, which emphasizes moral capacity and purpose in achieving happiness. In Indian society, caste plays a significant role in shaping the social, economic, and psychological aspects of individuals. Residential locale and family type are also critical demographic variables affecting well-being. This study aimed to investigate the effect of residential locale (rural vs. urban) on the well-being of scheduled caste undergraduate students. Using a survey method, 400 scheduled caste undergraduate students were selected as a sample. Data were analysed using mean, standard deviation, and t-tests. The findings revealed no significant differences in the well-being of scheduled caste students based on their residential locale.

Keywords: *Well-Being, Scheduled Caste, Residential locale,*

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a critical role in shaping the lives of individuals, particularly those from marginalized communities. Among these, students belonging to Scheduled Castes (SCs) occupy a unique position in India's socio-educational landscape, as they have historically faced systemic inequalities and discrimination. In this context, understanding the well-being of Scheduled Castes students becomes vital, not only for fostering inclusivity but also for ensuring equitable educational opportunities. The well-being of Scheduled Castes students is

a multifaceted construct influenced by various factors, including socio-economic status, educational infrastructure, family support, and demographic variables such as residential locale, gender, and parental education. Well-being is a broad construct encompassing physical, emotional, social, and psychological health. In the context of education, student well-being extends beyond academic achievements to include a sense of belonging, confidence, and motivation to pursue learning. It encompasses factors such as self-esteem, resilience, and the ability to cope with stress. For Scheduled Castes students, well-being is intertwined with their socio-cultural environment, access to resources, and the level of societal support they receive. The intersectionality of caste, economic disadvantage, and other demographic variables plays a significant role in shaping their experiences.

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AND THEIR IMPACT

Demographic variables, such as residential locale (rural vs. urban), gender, parental education, and family income, are critical determinants of students' well-being. Each of these variables interacts with the unique socio-cultural context of scheduled caste students, influencing their access to education, learning environment, and overall development.

1. **Residential Locale**: The distinction between rural and urban settings is particularly significant for SC students. Rural areas often suffer from a lack of adequate educational infrastructure, limited access to qualified teachers, and scarce extracurricular opportunities. On the other hand, urban students may have better facilities but might face more intense competition and social stigma in diverse educational settings.

2. **Gender**: Gender disparities further compound the challenges faced by scheduled caste students. Female students often encounter additional barriers such as early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and safety concerns. These factors can adversely affect their academic performance and psychological well-being.

3. **Parental Education and Family Income**: The educational background and income level of parents significantly influence the opportunities available to scheduled caste students. Families with higher levels of education and income are often better equipped to support their children's academic and emotional needs, reducing the impact of external stressors.

4. **Caste-Based Discrimination**: Although the legal framework in India prohibits caste-based discrimination, its subtle and overt forms persist in educational settings. These

experiences can have a profound psychological impact on scheduled caste students, affecting their self-esteem, motivation, and social integration.

SIGNIFICANCE AND RELEVANCE IN THE CURRENT EDUCATIONAL SCENARIO OF STUDYING SC STUDENTS' WELL-BEING

In recent years, there has been a growing focus on inclusive education and the role of socio-emotional learning in promoting well-being. Recognizing the specific needs of Scheduled Castes students is essential for creating an environment where they can thrive. By examining the relationship between demographic variables and well-being, educators and policymakers can identify gaps and design effective support systems. The introduction of programs such as scholarships, remedial classes, and mentorship initiatives for scheduled caste students has shown promise in bridging the educational divide. However, the efficacy of these programs largely depends on their ability to address the diverse needs of students based on their demographic characteristics. For instance, a rural Scheduled Castes student might require transportation facilities to access school, while an urban student might benefit more from counselling services to cope with social pressures. Scheduled Caste students often face systemic barriers, including social exclusion, stigma, and limited access to quality education. Despite various government initiatives and affirmative action policies, disparities in educational outcomes persist. These challenges necessitate a deeper understanding of the factors that influence their well-being. Exploring the role of demographic variables in this context provides valuable insights into the differential experiences of scheduled caste students, enabling policymakers, educators, and institutions to devise targeted interventions.

The well-being of Scheduled Caste students is a critical aspect of achieving educational equity and social justice. By understanding the influence of demographic variables, stakeholders can develop targeted strategies to support these students in overcoming challenges and realizing their full potential. This research area not only highlights the need for a compassionate approach to education but also underscores the importance of addressing systemic issues that perpetuate inequality. As India progresses toward a more inclusive society, ensuring the well-being of scheduled caste students will remain a cornerstone of its educational and social development policies.

Reviews of the Related Literature

Aggarwal et al. (2012) found that socio-demographic variables have minimal effect on subjective well-being (SWB) in urban areas. In contrast, Daraei (2013) highlighted those social factors, such as the educational level of parents, occupation, income, and family

relationships, significantly impact students' psychological well-being. Singh, Kaur, and Junnarkar (2014) observed that family and societal appreciation played a crucial role in improving the well-being of rural women. Tomer and Singh (2021) examined the role of family type and socio-economic status (SES) on psychological well-being (PWB) in rural populations and found no significant effects. Similarly, Azad (2021) revealed a negative correlation between SES and SWB, noting significant differences in SWB between Scheduled Caste (SC) and Non-Scheduled Caste (NSC) students, as well as between urban and rural students. Income and its association with SWB have been explored extensively. Stevenson and Wolfers (2013) and Diener and Biswas-Diener (2001) reported that the strength of the relationship between income and SWB diminishes as wealth increases. These findings align with Cooper and Stewart's (2013) review, which established that increased income positively influences children's outcomes, particularly in low-income households. Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) and Oishi, Kesebir, and Diener (2011) further reported that reducing income inequality improves SWB, suggesting that unequal income distribution negatively affects SWB. Studies have also linked SES to various aspects of quality of life. High SES is associated with better quality of life, reduced physiological stress, and enhanced immune functioning (Evans et al., 2000; Steptoe, Wardle, & Marmot, 2005). Conversely, low SES often leads to alienation, which includes feelings of uneasiness, discomfort, exclusion from social and cultural participation, and a breakdown of values, norms, and roles (Asthana, 2005). Easterlin (2003) established a paradox in which an increase in income does not always lead to a corresponding increase in satisfaction, as rising income levels often result in higher material expectations. Ryan, Howell, and Colleen (2008) emphasized that the positive effect of SES on SWB is stronger in low-income, developing economies than in developed nations.

Objective

1. To study the Well-Being of undergraduate scheduled caste students.
2. To compare the Well-Being of undergraduate scheduled caste students in relation to their Residential locale.

Methodology

Survey Method was employed.

Tool used

1. **Well-Being Index**

Well-Being Index developed by Dr. Vijayalaxmi Chouhan & Dr. Varsha Sharma is a self-report questionnaire consisting of 50 items designed to measure an individual's

mental status regarding overall feeling about life. The inventory measures six dimensions   namely;

1. Emotional Well-being

2. Psychological Well-being

3. Social Well-being

4. Spiritual Well-being

5. Self-Awareness

6. Physical Well-being

Sample

Sample for the study consisted of 400 undergraduate scheduled caste students from three districts (Kangra, Mandi and Chamba) of Himachal Pradesh.

Statistical technique used

To study the well-being and effect of residential locale (Rural and Urban) on well-being among Scheduled Caste students, mean and SDs along with t-value will be calculated

Limitation of the study

The present study was delimited to undergraduate scheduled caste students of Himachal Pradesh. Further, this study was delimited to independent variable; residential locale (Rural and Urban) and one dependent variable (well-being).

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

1.1 Level of Well-being of Undergraduate Scheduled Castes Students

Data obtained from the undergraduate students on well-being index is considered for computing different statistics and the values are presented in Table 1

Table 1

Frequency Distribution and Descriptive Statistics related to Well-Being Scores of Undergraduate Scheduled Castes Students

Class Interval	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Frequency Percentage
231-240	6	1.5	6	1.5
221-230	6	1.5	12	3
211-220	33	8.25	45	11.25
201-210	48	12	93	23.25
191-200	56	14	149	37.25
181-190	101	25.25	250	62.5
171-180	76	19	326	81.5
161-170	47	11.75	373	93.25
151-160	22	5.5	395	98.75

141-150	3	0.75	398	99.5
131-140	1	0.25	399	99.75
121-130	1	0.25	400	100
Total	400	100		
Descriptive Statistics	**Values**	**Descriptive Statistics**	**Values**	
Mean	186.785	Median	185	
Mode	184	SD	18.28742	
Skewness	0.144868	kurtosis	-0.06005	
Range	112	Q1 = 175	Q3=200	

The overview of raw data indicates that well-being scores of scheduled caste students varies from 126-238 showing a range of 112. The mean of well-being score for scheduled caste students is 186.785, which lie between Q1 and Q3 indicating that the data obtained on well-being of scheduled caste students is normal. According to the norms given in well-being index, the range of Z- scores +0.51 and above indicates the high level of well-being, -0.50 to +50 indicates an average level of well-being while the z-scores -0.51 and below represents a low level of well-being. In this study, a very high percentage (98.75 per cent) of scheduled caste students possesses a high level of well-being while a 37.25 per cent scheduled caste students possesses an average level of well-being. A very negligible percentage (1.5 per cent) of scheduled caste students possesses low level of well-being. Hence, the hypothesis Ho1: There exists no significant difference in well-being of scheduled caste students in higher education is rejected. It means that well-being of scheduled caste students in higher education differ significantly. The distribution of scheduled caste students according to their level of well-being is pictorially shown in figure - 1

Figure 1

Pie- chart showing Percentage Distribution of Undergraduate Scheduled Castes Students according to their level of 'well-being'

Figure 2

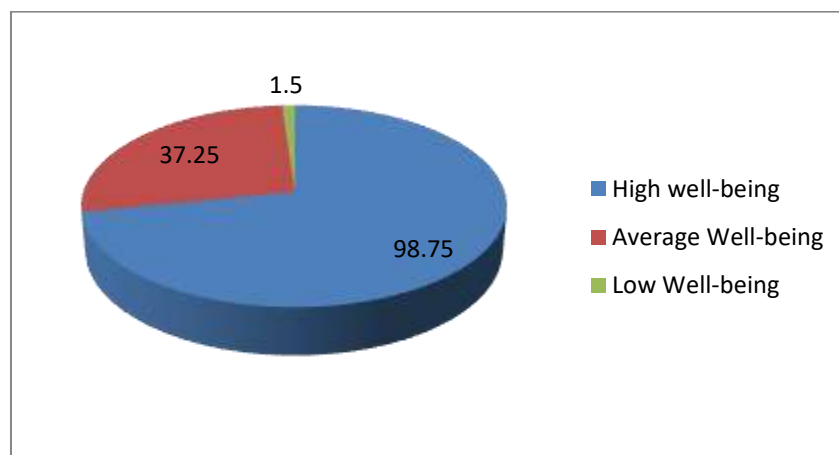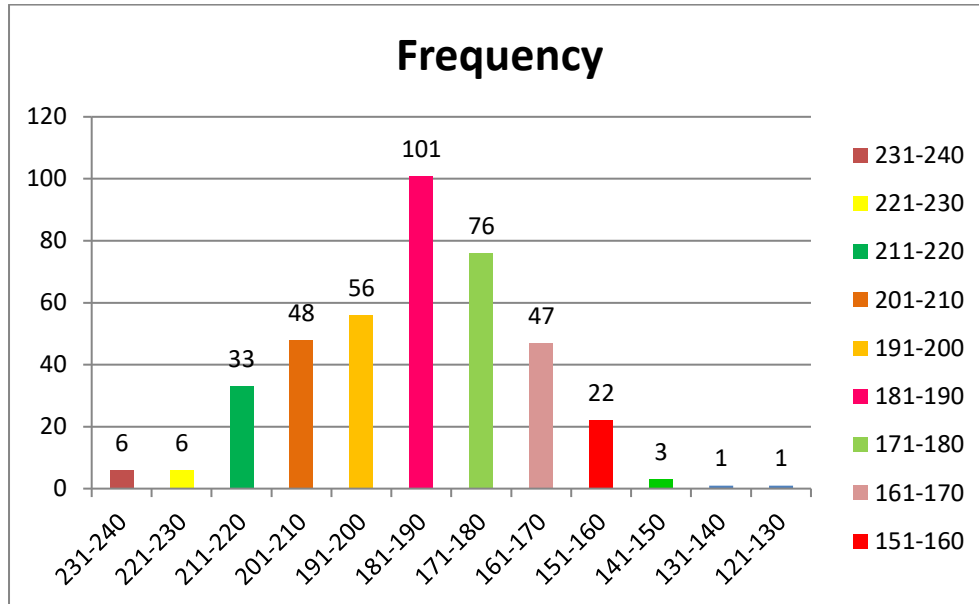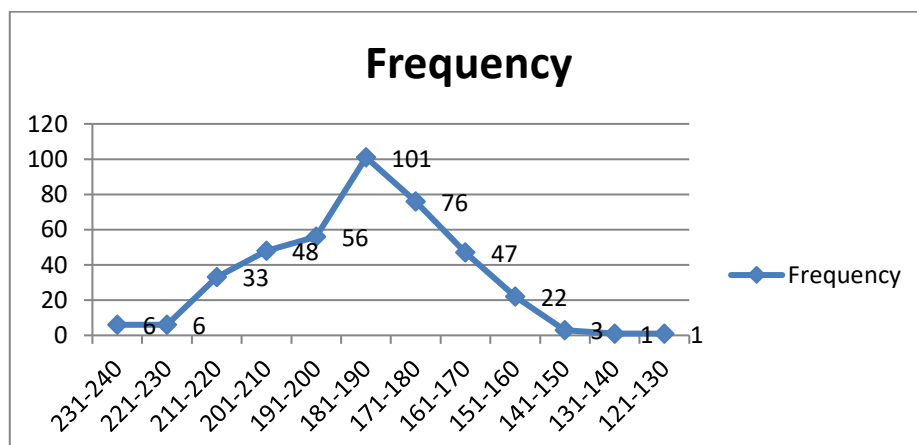**Frequency Polygon Showing Distribution of Overall Well-Being Scores of Undergraduate Scheduled Castes Students**

The distribution of overall well-being scores of undergraduate students of scheduled castes are shown in figure -2which appears nearly normal in shape.

The mean (186.785) and median (185) are close, and the coefficient of skewness (0.145) is near zero, confirming that the distribution is approximately normal. The kurtosis value (-0.060) indicates slight platykurtic characteristics, further supporting the normality of the distribution. The distribution of well-being scores of scheduled caste students is shown in figure 3 which appears nearly normal in shape.

Figure 3

Frequency Polygon Showing of 'well-being scores' of Undergraduate Scheduled Castes Students

Findings of the study

- **Undergraduate Scheduled Caste students possess a high level of well-being.** The majority (98.75%) of Scheduled Caste students were found to have a high level of well-being, as per the well-being index norms.

- **No significant difference was found in the well-being of undergraduate Scheduled Caste students with respect to their residential locale (rural or urban).** The t-value (0.601) was non-significant, indicating that residential locale does not influence the well-being of Scheduled Caste undergraduate students.

Suggestions

Well-being is a crucial aspect of life. Without strong well-being, individuals may not reach their full potential. A robust sense of well-being provides the confidence needed to take on various tasks effectively. Both the way others perceive us and the way we perceive ourselves significantly impact our well-being. As parents and teachers, it is our primary responsibility to nurture and enhance a child's well-being. To develop and sustain positive well-being, the following suggestions are offered:

1. Encourage all students to actively participate in building a culture that values diversity and fosters positive, respectful relationships.

2. Celebrate academic achievements and contributions to classroom culture, as this not only promotes continued positive behaviour but also creates opportunities for shared joyful moments.

3. Attend informational or developmental classes to gain insights and strategies for improving well-being.

4. Maintain regular contact with family and friends to nurture social connections.

5. Accept and adapt to changes, as they are a natural part of life.

6. Understand that you don't need to please everyone; prioritize self-respect and authenticity.

7. Join social clubs or community groups to meet new friends and prevent feelings of loneliness or isolation.

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