

**Academic Motivation of Cisgender Students in South India - The Relationships with Social Connectedness and Perceived Discrimination**

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**Abstract**

**Background:** Sexual minority individuals experience discrimination and stigma because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, which can adversely affect their psychological well-being and academic functioning. Although sexual minorities include diverse groups such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, hijra, and kothi individuals, the present study primarily represents cisgender sexual minority college students. Academic motivation, which influences students' effort, persistence, and engagement in learning, may be shaped by psychosocial factors such as social connectedness, and perceived discrimination.

**Aim:** The present aim of this study was to investigate the academic motivation cisgender lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGBQ) college students in South India and examine its relationship with locus of control, social connectedness, and perceived discrimination.

**Methods and material:** a cross-sectional research design was adopted for the study. A total of 100 cisgender participants identified through snowball and convenient sampling. Data was collected using socio-demographic sheet, academic motivation scale, Rotter. Participants were informed about the objectives and procedures of the study before data collection. They were assured that their participation was entirely voluntary and that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee of JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru, before the commencement of data collection.

**Results:** It was revealed that social connectedness is significantly associated with academic motivation. Pearson correlation findings stated that social connectedness had a positive correlation and perceived discrimination had a negative correlation with academic motivation. Using linear regression, it was found that social connectedness positively predicts academic motivation, while perceived discrimination negatively predicts it.

**Key Words:** Sexual minority, academic motivation, social connectedness, perceived discrimination.

**Introduction:** Sexual minorities represent a category of individuals whose sexual identities, orientations or practices differ from the prevailing norms of society. This group typically encompasses

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individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or asexual (PUCL-K, 2001). College campuses are dynamic spaces that depend on inclusivity and trust to foster learning and enable students to feel secure while exploring academic resources and navigating social networks. Contemporary research on college students now also focuses on specific groups including students who identify as sexual minorities or as part of the LGBTQIA+ community. It is essential to provide students with the best possible educational opportunities to facilitate genuine learning and provide academic motivation.

Some of these factors include perceived discrimination based on their identity as well as experiences of depression, anxiety and stress and how they cope with it. Closely related to coping is the aspect of locus of control. Additionally, the extent to which they disclose their identity or outness affects their academic performance (Dentato et al., 2014; Kosciw et al., 2015). They are at increased risk of discrimination and encounter negative consequences on their mental and physical health due to it. Therefore, understanding these factors through this study will be crucial given the growing population of sexual minority college students.

**Academic Motivation:** McGrew defines academic motivation as a student's desire, reflected in their approach, persistence, and level of interest in academic subjects, when their competence is judged against a standard of performance or excellence. According to Shunk et al. (2008), Academic motivation encompasses the level of effort students invest, their adeptness in self-regulation, their choices of academic pursuits and their persistence when encountering challenges. Influential factors include gender, specific interests, parental education level, and curriculum structures, which collectively account for over 20% of differences in academic motivation.

**Social Connectedness:** Social Connectedness, defined as the feeling of belonging to a community, plays a pivotal role in individual health and well-being. It fosters relationships, community engagement, and the creation of inclusive, supportive environments. Nevertheless, certain groups including sexual minorities may face a lack of these connections, leaving them vulnerable to social isolation and exclusion. Social connectedness encompasses various interrelated constructs, including social support, social networks, and the absence of perceived social isolation (Lamblin et al., 2017).

**Perceived Discrimination:** Discrimination involves unfair treatment due to societal structures favoring certain groups, and allowing them to dominate over other groups (Krieger, 1999). Perceived discrimination refers to individuals' subjective experiences of unfair treatment based on personal attributes (Banks et al., 2006).

Mathies, N. and colleagues (2019) conducted a study that investigated the impact of heterosexist phrases such as "that's so gay" and "no homo", on academic engagement outcomes among 574 cisgender sexual minority college students. The research found that increased exposure to these microaggressions was significantly associated with worse academic outcomes, particularly in terms of developmental challenge and hearing "no homo" was linked to lower college GPA scores. Kollmann (2014) investigated sexual identity acceptance and its relation to self-determination for LGB-identified

university students within classroom setting. The study revealed significant correlations between sexual identity acceptance, basic psychological needs satisfaction, and self-determination among LGB-identified university students. Higher levels of sexual identity acceptance were associated with greater fulfilment of basic needs and enhanced self-determination within classroom settings. Additionally, qualitative insights highlighted the impact of social contexts, familial acceptance, and internalized attitudes on students' experiences of identity acceptance and academic engagement.

Mahesh, N.M. (2022) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between academic achievement, locus control and anxiety among college students in Aurangabad. The results revealed that high achievers tended to have a more external Locus of control, while low achievers had higher levels of anxiety compared to their high achieving counterparts. Jdaitawi (2015) investigated the predictors of self-regulation among 209 undergraduate students during their preparatory year at the University of Dammam in Saudi Arabia. The study found significant positive relationships between social connectedness, self-efficacy, and self-control with self-regulation. Furthermore, the results indicated that both social connectedness and self-control served as predictors of students' self-regulation, whereas self-efficacy did not. The study conducted by İpek Göçmen and Volkan Yılmaz (2017) explores perceived discrimination among LGBT individuals in Turkey. Key findings indicate that LGBT individuals experience both direct and indirect discrimination in accessing these essential services. It also highlights the absence of legal protection for LGBT rights in Turkey, with many participants reporting dissatisfaction with the responsiveness of the justice system to address their grievances.

Discrimination based on sexual orientation can negatively impact students' academic motivation, leading to feelings of exclusion, lower self-esteem, and decreased engagement with learning. Moreover, sexual minority students may also belong to other marginalized groups based on ethnicity, religion, race, caste or disability, further complicating their experiences in academic environments. Understanding how these intersecting identities influence academic motivation is crucial for creating inclusive and supportive educational environments for all students (Varsik & Gorochovskij, 2023).

This study aims to investigate the academic motivation of cisgender college students, focusing on the interplay between social connectedness, perceived discrimination, and academic motivation. This research is motivated by the scarcity of studies addressing this population's educational experiences (Yilmaz et al., 2017; Varsik & Gorochovskij, 2023). Moreover, the Western-centric focus of previous studies overlooks the unique socio-cultural dynamics of sexual minority individuals in South India, necessitating investigation into how these factors manifest in this context. Additionally, while studies have explored the impact of discrimination on academic outcomes (Alfaro et al., 2008), there is a gap in understanding its manifestation in academic settings for cisgender college students in South India.

**Methods and Material:** Present study adopts the cross-sectional descriptive research design.

A total of 100 participants who identified as cisgender students currently enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate programs across universities in South India were contacted through snowball and a convenient sampling method. Participants were selected based on their self-identification as sexual

minorities, between the ages 18-28 years. As the study employed non-probability sampling methods, the sample may not be fully representative of the broader population of sexual minority students in South India.

**Following tools were used for data collection:**

- 1) Socio-Demographic data sheet: Information regarding their age, gender, sexual orientation current level of college education, socio-economic background and more. Additionally, they were also asked if they identify as a transgender individual.
- 2) Academic Motivation Scale (AMS-C 28): Developed by Vallerand and colleagues (1992) consist of 28 items that are separated into 7 subscales evaluating three types of motivation namely, Intrinsic motivation (IM), extrinsic motivation (EM) and Amotivation assessed on a 7-point scale. A self-determination score between the ranges -18 to 18 is obtained through calculations based on the mean of each of the seven subscales. Higher the self-determination score, higher the academic motivation and vice versa. The AMS-C 28 has satisfactory internal validity and consistency. Cronbach alpha value is 0.79.
- 3) Social Connectedness Scale (SCS-R): Developed by Lee and Robbins (1995), consists of 20 items assessing closeness in interpersonal relations and difficulties in establishing social connectedness. Scores range from 20 to 120, with higher scores indicating greater social connectedness. The scale incorporates reverse scoring for negatively worded items ( $\alpha > 0.92$ ).
- 4) Everyday Discrimination Scale: Developed by Williams et al. (1997), comprises 9 items measuring experiences of unfair treatment on a daily basis. Scores range from 0 to 36, with higher scores indicating more frequent discriminatory experiences.

**Results:** The study aimed to investigate the relationships among academic motivation, locus of control, social connectedness, and experiences of discrimination among sexual minority college students in South India. The socio-demographic details of sexual minority college students in South Indian colleges were recorded. The mean age of the participants was 22 years, with a majority identifying as female (68.0%). Most participants were pursuing postgraduate or M Phil programs (52.0%), and the majority identified their sexual orientation as bisexual (48.0%). Regarding socioeconomic status, a significant proportion fell into the middle category (63.0%). Most participants resided in urban areas (77.0%), lived in nuclear families (72.0%), and were reported as single (67.0%). Religiously, the majority identified as Hindu (51.0%), and nearly all participants identified as cisgender or preferred not to identify (93.0%).

**Table 1. Mean and SD values of the variables**

| Variables                | Mean  | Standard Deviation |
|--------------------------|-------|--------------------|
| Locus of Control         | 14.26 | 3.23               |
| Social Connectedness     | 74.84 | 18.03              |
| Perceived Discrimination | 19.22 | 5.71               |
| Academic Motivation      | 4.15  | 5.82               |
|                          |       |                    |

Table 1 presents mean and standard deviation values for the variables. The mean was 74.84( SD-18.03) for social connectedness which indicates moderate connectedness or feeling isolated at

times/infrequently, mean score of 19.22( SD Score - 5.71) for perceived discrimination indicates moderate level of feeling of being discriminated, and 4.15 (SD-5.82) for academic motivation indicating positive level of self-determined academic motivation The SDI ranges from -18 to +18, with higher positive scores indicating greater self-determined (autonomous) academic motivation and lower or negative scores indicating greater externally regulated or motivated academic orientation.

**Table 2. Distribution of Student Profiles among Sexual Minority College Students in South India across the variables**

|                          |      | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------|------|-----------|------------|
| Social Connectedness     | Low  | 48        | 48.0%      |
|                          | High | 52        | 52.0%      |
| Perceived Discrimination | Low  | 55        | 55.0%      |
|                          | High | 45        | 45.0%      |
| Academic Motivation      | Low  | 49        | 49.0%      |
|                          | High | 51        | 51.0%      |

Table 2 illustrates the distribution of student profiles based on internal versus external locus of control, social connectedness, perceived discrimination, and academic motivation. Similarly, the distribution of students reporting low versus high levels of social connectedness and perceived discrimination offers insights into the differential experiences and their potential implications for academic motivation

**Table 3. Correlation of Social Connectedness and Perceived Discrimination with Academic Motivation**

|                          |                     | Academic Motivation | Social Connectedness | Perceived Discrimination |
|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Academic Motivation      | Pearson Correlation | -                   | .433**               | -.235*                   |
|                          |                     |                     | .000                 | .019                     |
| Social Connectedness     | Pearson Correlation | .433**              | -                    | -.389**                  |
|                          |                     | .000                |                      | .000                     |
| Perceived Discrimination | Pearson Correlation | -.235*              | -.389**              | -                        |
|                          |                     | .019                | .000                 |                          |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at a 0.01 level

The correlation analysis in Table 3 demonstrates significant positive correlations between social connectedness and academic motivation ( $r = .433$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and significant negative correlations between perceived discrimination and academic motivation ( $r = -.235$ ,  $p = .019$ ).

Table 4 presents the results of the linear regression analyses examining the predictive effects of social connectedness and perceived discrimination on academic motivation. Social connectedness was found to be a significant positive predictor of academic motivation ( $R = 0.433$ ,  $R^2 = 0.187$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.179$ ,  $F(1, 98) = 22.589$ ,  $p < .001$ ), explaining 18.7% of the variance in academic motivation. Based on the unstandardized regression coefficient ( $B = 0.140$ ), a one-unit increase in social connectedness was associated with a 0.140-unit increase in academic motivation. Perceived discrimination also significantly predicted academic motivation ( $R = 0.235$ ,  $R^2 = 0.055$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.046$ ,

**Table 4. Linear Regression Analysis for Social Connectedness and Perceived Discrimination Predicting Academic Motivation**

| Model                    | RR    | R Square | Adjusted R Squar | Std. Error | R Square Change | df | Sig.          |
|--------------------------|-------|----------|------------------|------------|-----------------|----|---------------|
| Social Connectedness     | 0.433 | 0.187    | 0.179            | 5.28       | 0.187           | 98 | <b>0.000*</b> |
| Perceived Discrimination | 0.235 | 0.055    | 0.046            | 5.69       | 0.055           | 98 | <b>0.019*</b> |

The significance levels were set at  $p < 0.05$  (\*)

$F(1, 98) = 5.733$ ,  $p = .019$ ), accounting for 5.5% of the variance in academic motivation. The unstandardized regression coefficient ( $B = -0.240$ ) indicated that a one-unit increase in perceived discrimination was associated with a 0.240-unit decrease in academic motivation.

**Discussion:** There have been the diverse range of sexual orientations reported in the sample underscores the importance of considering the intersectionality of identities within sexual minority populations (Kachhi & Sharma, 2022). This finding is consistent with previous research highlighting the importance of social support networks in fostering academic motivation and success (Marler et al., 2021; Jdaitawi, 2015). However, perceived discrimination shows negative association with academic motivation ( $\chi^2 = 2.523$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .112$ ). Although previous research has suggested that experiences of discrimination may negatively impact academic motivation (Alfaro et al., 2008; Dotterer & Lowe, 2015), the current findings support this relationship. It is possible that other factors not accounted for in this study may influence the relationship between perceived discrimination and academic motivation among cisgender college students. The Everyday Discrimination Scale used in this study measures how often people feel that others treat them unfairly on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, physical appearance, sexual orientation, caste, class and other characteristics as well. This intersectionality of identities could play a role in this relationship.

Further results indicated that higher levels of Social Connectedness are associated with higher Academic Motivation among sexual minority college students, aligning with previous research highlighting the importance of social support and connectedness in promoting academic motivation (Marler et al., 2021; Jdaitawi, 2015). Prior literature also links experiences of discrimination to decreased academic motivation (Alfaro et al., 2008; Dotterer & Lowe, 2015). Additionally, a significant negative correlation was found between perceived discrimination and social connectedness ( $r = -.389$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This provides additional implications on the detrimental impact of discrimination on social relationships and connectedness within this population (İpek Göçmen & Volkan Yılmaz, 2017; Blankenship et al., 2021).

Table 3 findings are consistent with prior research that address the issue of discrimination and promote inclusivity within educational institutions to support the academic success and well-being of sexual minority students (Jdaitawi, 2015; Liu et al., 2019; Harrison et al., 2020).

**Conclusion:** The findings suggest that cisgender college students in South India exhibit varying levels of academic motivation, influenced by factors such as social connectedness, and perceived discrimination. While social connectedness positively contributes to academic motivation, experiences of discrimination may negatively impact motivation, but to a limited extent.

**Limitations:** One limitation is the reliance solely on the Everyday Discrimination Scale (EDS) for assessing perceived discrimination among cisgender college students, potentially overlooking other key socio-political factors. The small sample size, limited to South India, may restrict generalizability. The cross-sectional design limits causal inference, and the quantitative focus may overlook qualitative insights. Social desirability bias could affect responses on sensitive topics.

The study employed snowball and convenience sampling, which may have introduced selection bias. Participants who were socially connected or more open about their sexual identity were more likely to be recruited and to participate, potentially differing from those who were less socially connected or not openly identifying as cisgender. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted with caution, as the

results may not be generalizable to all cisgender students in South India.

### Implications

Creating inclusive policies and support systems, anti-discrimination policies, LGBTQIA+ inclusive curricula, cultural sensitivity, and training for educators and counselors. Collaborative efforts involving educational institutions for students to fulfil their academic needs and performance overall.

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