

Research Article

Genders, Ecologies and Social Interest: Perception across Diverse Developmental Stages

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Abstract: The author inspects the effect of ecological settings and gender on the development of social interest in adolescence, young adults, and middle adults. 360 Participants (male and female) from urban and rural India completed the Social Interest Index scale (Greever, Tseng & Friedland, 1973) and provided the demographic information. Results indicate that ecologies and gender are related to the development of social interest in adolescence, young adults, and middle adults. Middle adult participants displayed higher scores on self-significance than young adults and adolescents however young adults displayed higher scores concerning love and work. Male participants exhibited better social interest especially in the domains of self-significance and work. The females unveiled somewhat superior SI than male participants related to the domains of friendship and love. Nevertheless, the adolescents demonstrated more friendship scores than the other age groups. At large, the findings seem to reflect the roles and responsibilities that change with age and gender.

Keywords: Social Interest, Ecologies, Developmental Stage, Gender.

INTRODUCTION

Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed...

(From the Preamble to the Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)

Cited by Gardner Murphy (1953). *In the Minds of Men*. New York: Basic Books.

The lines cited above suggest that conflict and harmony both are primarily 'psychological' in nature. In this context the increasing research attention to happiness and wellbeing under the emerging subfield of positive psychology is commendable. It tries to understand human strengths and promote them to realize the potentialities present in the individual. Remarkably most of the past wellbeing studies have been centered around the nature, experience, and correlates of individual-level functioning without emphasizing the social aspect of wellbeing. The present era of globalization and technological advancement demands massive collaborative engagements at the level of the individual as well as society to have a productive society. However, a large number of

individuals across societies have engaged themselves in self-centric activities and developed a false sense of self-efficacy. The psychological literature linked to happiness, well-being, and quality of life also empowered individuals and ignored social.

Against this backdrop, this work was apprehended to explore the perceived experience of social interest across the genders, ecologies, and different developmental stages. The focal motivation came from the understanding and engrossment in normal happenings in the recent Indian settings where improvement and countrywide growth are being apprehended due to intimidations for social interest. Under the influence of globalization, there is a discrete change toward privatization and liberalization. In comparison to other states in the Indian subcontinent, the accomplishments of our country are amazing. However, it has been spoiled by numerous discouraging aspects that are posing various threats such as corruption, declining work culture, increasing hostility, violence, etc. to the nation. This study, therefore, intends to explore the perceived experience of social interest in the background of some crucial social

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circumstances as ecology, developmental stage, and gender. These extensive settings are significant since they signify momentous inequalities and disparities in the lived involvements of Indian society.

Social interest (SI) has been considered as one of the critical ideas notionally associated with the social aspect of happiness, wellbeing, and quality of life. It encompasses a sense of belongingness (Ansbacher, 1991). SI encourages individuals to renounce individual wants for the social obligation to others (Magen & Aharoni, 1991). The idea of SI may be traced back to more than ninety years (e.g., Adler, 1927/1959), though it was ignored in the ubiquitous models of health and adjustment (Crandall, 1980). Yet, SI has been incorporated by numerous modern psychologists (e.g., Erickson, 1963; Maslow, 1971) and is today recognized as a vital constituent of positive mental health (Ansbacher, 1991).

Numerous similar concepts are being practiced by psychologists which comprise the features such as social empathy, care, and concern for others, compassion, helping others, altruistic behaviors, etc. These features can be summed up together and may be considered as the broad features of SI. Therefore, the SI may involve the enhancement of a sense of community, equality, empathy, mutual respect, caring, cooperation, and responsibility for self and others. Some other appearances like sincerity, self-reliance, maturing, and encouraging behaviors could also be the integral features of SI (Watkins, 1994). In a few studies, SI was stated positively correlated with emotional empathy, interpersonal contact, and happiness (Watkins & St. John, 1994; Mozdierz, Greenblatt, & Murphy, 1986).

The German expression 'Gemeinschaftsgefühl' is routinely translated as 'SI' or 'Social Feeling' (Ansbacher, 1991). Abraham Maslow attributed Adler's confidence in SI as the prime portrayal of self-realized individuals (Ansbacher, 1991). SI has been measured as a device of virtuous psychological well-being. Nikely (1971) encouraged SI as an "archetype" for mental health or model for observing this world. The word anomies (anarchy) have been used by Existential philosophers to designate the opposite of SI (Ansbacher, 1991). Kaplan (1991) pronounced the explicit behaviors, feelings, and thoughts linked with SI. They consist of serving, contributing, admiration, collaboration, conciliation, compassion, praise, and improving, as behavior components; connectedness, feeling of homeliness, cohesion, confidence in others, being humanoid, and sanguinity, as affective component; and the cognitive feature as my objectives can be conquered in manners dependable with the wellbeing of the community.

SI is one of the fundamentals of Adler's theoretical interpretation of personality. It is the foremost feature of everyone and is rooted in his

altogether actions (Adler, 1937). SI suggests a sense of social sensitivity toward all humanity. SI is demonstrated in the life responsibilities of friendship, love, and work. SI is appealed to impact an inclusive variety of personality appearances and is expected to be vital to psychological wellbeing (Ansbacher, 1968). Preceding studies disclose this clarification. Greater SI values are exposed to associate positively with altruism, cooperation, and trustworthiness; the optimistic appearance of religious belief; happiness and sense of humor; developmental stage; and worth of alliance (Crandall, 1982; Crandall & Harris, 1991; Hsieh, 1987; Leak & Williams, 1989; Dixon et al. 1986; Mennier & Royce, 1988; Barkley et al. 1984). Some studies stated a negative correlation of SI with narcissism, loneliness, sexual permissiveness, and possession of negative life goals (Joubert, 1986; Miller et al. 1987; Leak & Gardner, 1990); Leak et al. 1985).

The diverse planes of SI are displayed in the cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral processes. Therefore, it may be sensibly expected that SI would impact an individual's attention, perception, thinking about others, feelings such as empathy and sympathy, and finally motives and overt behavior relating to cooperation, helping, sharing contributing, and so on. In its utmost advanced system, SI would view as identifying with and working toward the betterment of humanity "under the aspect of eternity" (Adler, 1931/1964).

Adler (1927) presumed that the unsuccessful endeavors to inculcate SI in kids and youngsters will have the outcome of lesser SI and larger psychological trouble in maturity (Manaster & Corsini, 1995). Mozdierz et al. (1986) also agreed with Adler and described a reverse relationship between SI and psychopathology, in research concerning hospitalized alcoholics. Some researches exposed that the children who show minimal societal abilities are at a bigger hazard of developing unfitting interpersonal relationships, having inferior academic achievement, and becoming school dropouts (Newcomb, Bukowski & Pattee, 1993). Adolescents revealed an adverse connection of social interest and self-concept among conduct-disordered subjects (Sweitzer, 2005). Other research unveiled an encouraging link of SI with the sense of belonging among adolescent participants. More or less, it is significant to get trained in social skills to promote SI. The absence of SI may have some negative consequences on an individual's social functioning. Edwards, Gfroerer, Flowers, and Whitaker (2004) stated negative correlations with certain pathologies by those individuals who appraised inferior in these categories. Criminal offenders with low SI were more likely to be unemployed, have new felony arrests, and become re-incarcerated within 27 months of release from prison. Some of the important machinery in these negative behaviors comprise the lack of the ability to establish care and concern for others as well as lacking

empathy and a sense of social interest. The teaching of SI and empathy may be best learned at a young age (Daugherty, Murphy, & Paugh, 2001).

Unfortunately, existing psychological literature relating to the nature of social interest and its relationship with the psycho-social influences has acknowledged only partial attention and they are ineffectually discovered. In the Indian context where cultural diversity is a momentous facet of social life, an investigation of social interest in the backdrop of genders, ecologies, and developmental stages is needed. The present-day Indian culture mirrors a broadening breach in the quality of life of the people from different socio-economic strata. The part of ecologies (e.g., rural/urban) developmental span (e. g. adolescent/young adult/middle adult), employment status, education, and gender in undermining and augmenting social interest is still unexplored. This research attempts to explore the perceived experience of social interest in the Indian background with an emphasis on some vital circumstantial and individual variables. They were finalized based on past research and analysis of recent societal settings. Grounded on the existing study it was wished-for that social interest can be hypothesized as a function of manifold particular and contextual aspects. The background features measured in this study included ecology, gender, and developmental stage. Keeping this the following objectives were proposed.

OBJECTIVE

- To investigate the role of ecology, developmental stage, and gender in shaping the experiences social interest.

Hypotheses

- The magnitude of social interest would evince significant differences between the rural and urban ecologies
- The male and female participants would differ in the degree of social interest.
- The degree of social interest would demonstrate significant developmental changes leading to differences among the adolescent, young adult, and middle adult participants.

Method

Participants and Procedure

360 individuals (180 males and 180 females) contributed to this study. Among them were

adolescents, young adults, and middle adults. The age range of individuals was from 15 years to 65 years ($M=33.50$, $SD= 11.99$). The data was similarly taken from two ecologies such as rural region Gorakhpur and urban region National Capital Region of Delhi. Most of the individual participants were related to lower-middle and upper-middle-class socioeconomic circumstances. The study involved a 2x2x3 between-group model factorial design (Ecologies (Urban and Rural) x Genders (Male and Female) x Developmental Stages (Adolescence, Young Adulthood, and Middle Adulthood). The sample was briefed discretely. The questionnaire was administered and in case of any difficulty regarding language, instruction, etc., the same was elucidated. The uncertainties of any kind associated with the study were dealt with properly by the researcher. The participants were communicated that the contribution is a volunteer and they are free to pull out their partaking at any stretch. It was highlighted that the replies should denote their beliefs and the same should be accomplished altogether. It was also secured that namelessness and privacy would be sustained.

Measures

The Social Interest Index was developed by Greever, Tseng, and Friedland (1973). It has consisted of 32 items concerning four domains with 5-point rating scales, extending from "very true" (1) to "very untrue" (5). It was accepted from English and then back transformation was done whereas evolving its Hindi form. Statements were premeditated to assess Adlerian's life goals of friendship, love, work, and self-significance. The validity of the SII was found primarily through factor analytics (e.g., Greever *et al.*, 1973; Leak, 1982b) and trait validity strategies (e.g., Bubenzer, Zarski, & Walter, 1991). An example of the items includes "I feel good about getting married" "I feel rules are necessary".

RESULT

Table 1 reflects that in general rural male and female adolescence, young adult, and middle adult participants reported greater scores on all the factors of social interest index except on the work subscale than their counterparts from the urban region. However, an urban adolescent male and middle adult female exhibited higher scores than their counterparts from rural region whereas rural male and female young adult, rural male middle adult and rural female adolescence participants illustrated greater scores on work subscale than their counterparts from the urban region.

Table-1: Means and SDs of scores on SII by Ecological Setting, Gender and Developmental Stage

Social Interest Index	Rural						Urban					
	Male			Female			Male			Female		
	Adolescence n=30	Young Adult n=30	Middle Adult n=30	Adolescence n=30	Young Adult n=30	Middle Adult n=30	Adolescence n=30	Young Adult n=30	Middle Adult n=30	Adolescence n=30	Young Adult n=30	Middle Adult n=30
Social Interest	10.37 (1.58)	11.90 (1.84)	12.10 (1.81)	10.60 (2.02)	11.23 (1.50)	11.13 (1.81)	10.27 (1.85)	10.73 (1.14)	11.37 (1.75)	10.10 (2.02)	10.30 (2.20)	11.10 (1.65)
Self-Significance	32.60 (7.02)	34.58 (5.69)	32.98 (5.50)	30.77 (4.51)	32.92 (5.30)	33.06 (5.81)	31.50 (7.24)	33.13 (4.83)	32.18 (5.29)	29.10 (5.95)	27.87 (6.14)	32.36 (4.21)
Friendship	26.70 (4.36)	24.89 (3.59)	25.30 (3.21)	26.03 (4.37)	25.78 (3.86)	26.15 (4.44)	25.62 (4.52)	23.33 (3.83)	24.56 (3.99)	25.77 (4.16)	23.75 (4.06)	24.40 (3.55)
Love	26.70 (4.05)	28.21 (3.76)	27.14 (4.54)	28.47 (4.01)	29.67 (2.40)	27.57 (3.06)	25.20 (4.70)	27.20 (4.58)	25.54 (4.20)	26.47 (4.47)	26.97 (4.38)	26.30 (5.11)
Work	22.33 (2.23)	25.50 (3.06)	24.87 (2.87)	24.20 (2.53)	24.03 (3.47)	22.81 (3.46)	24.97 (3.54)	23.83 (2.60)	22.90 (3.58)	22.91 (3.47)	22.80 (3.38)	24.03 (3.05)

Note. SDs is given in parentheses.

Table 2 shows the main effects of the social interest index. The ANOVAs demonstrated that the participants from rural regions evinced greater scores on all the subscales of the social interest index than their counterparts from the urban region. The male participants scored better than the female participants on social interest, self-significance, and work subscales whereas female participants exhibited slightly more

than male participants on friendship and love subscales. Middle adult participants illustrated higher scores than young adult and adolescent participants on social interest and self-significance subscales whereas young adults showed better values on the love and work domains of the SI scale. Though, adolescents showed a more sophisticated level of friendship than young adult and middle adult participants.

Table-2: Mean Scores on the Components of SII as a Function of Main Effects

Social Interest Index	Ecological Setting			Gender			Developmental Stage			
	Rural n=180	Urban n=180	F-ratio	Male n=180	Female n=180	F-ratio	Adolescence n=120	Young Adult n=120	Middle Adult n=120	F-ratio
Social Interest	11.22	10.64	9.37**	11.12	10.74	4.06*	10.33	11.04	11.42	11.55***
Self-Significance	32.82	31.02	8.95**	32.82	31.01	9.15**	30.99	32.12	32.65	2.65
Friendship	25.81	24.57	8.55**	25.07	25.31	.33	26.03	24.44	25.10	4.77**
Love	27.96	26.28	14.68***	26.66	27.57	4.29*	26.71	28.01	26.64	4.15*
Work	23.96	23.57	1.36	24.07	23.46	3.35	23.60	24.04	23.65	.71

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Ecological settings x developmental stages interaction was significant for the community feeling at the workplace, $F = 3.41$, $p < .05$. Figure 7 shows that community feeling at the workplace was displayed greater by rural young and middle adult participants

than their counterparts from urban regions whereas urban adolescent participants reported a higher level of community feeling at the workplace than the rural adolescent participants.

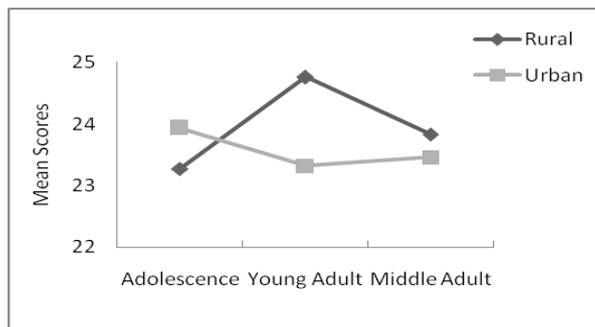


Fig-1: Work by ecological settings x developmental stages interaction

Gender x ecological settings x developmental stage interaction was significant for the community

feeling at the workplace, $F = 9.84$, $p < .001$. Figure 2 shows that community feeling at the workplace was

displayed greater by rural young and middle male adult participants than their female counterparts whereas adolescent rural female participants reported a higher level of community feeling at the workplace than the rural male adolescent participants. However, urban

male adolescence and male young adult participants showed more community feeling at the workplace than their female counterparts whereas urban middle adult female participants displayed higher community feeling at the workplace than their male counterparts.

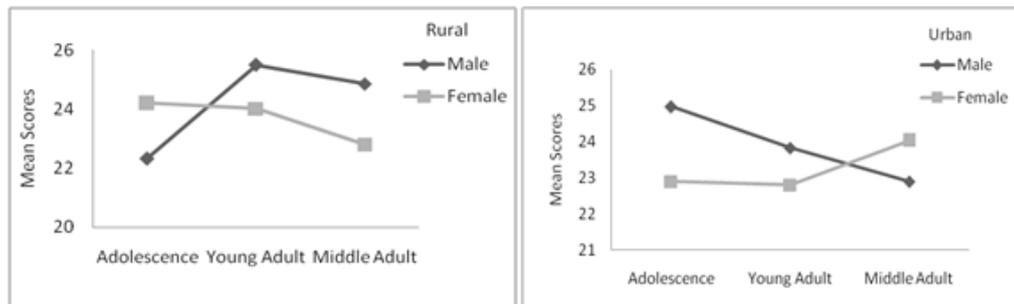


Fig-2: Work by Gender x ecological settings x developmental stages interaction

DISCUSSION

The present study was commenced with an idea to examine the perceived experience of social interest from psychological viewpoints. Ensuring a contextual tactic, the present research analytically explained the outline of social interest concerning ecological context, gender, and developmental stages. The investigation displayed significant effects of ecology, gender, and developmental stage on the perception and experience of social interest as it was decided to inspect the form of connections distinctly for the diverse clusters.

Social interest (SI) comprises the development of a sense of community, equality, empathy, mutual respect, care, cooperation, and responsibility for self and others. The results substantiated greater SI among the rural than urban participants. The males showed greater social interest particularly on the subscales of self-significance and work. The females exhibited slightly greater SI than males on friendship and love subscales. The findings seem to reflect the roles and responsibilities that vary with age and gender. Participants from the middle adulthood stage showed self-significance whereas young adults reported greater scores on love and work subscales. Middle adulthood is the stage in which the striving for self-significance is strongest whereas young adults and adolescents are at the formative stage of identity development. That is why self-significance is increasing with age. However, the adolescents displayed a higher level of friendship.

A higher-level interaction was significant for the community feeling at the workplace. It was stronger in the rural young and middle male adult participants than their female counterparts. It may be the reflection of collectiveness and sharing expressed by the rural young and middle adult participants than their urban counterparts. The adolescent rural females reported greater community feeling at the workplace than rural males. However, the urban male adolescents and male young adults showed greater community feeling at the

workplace than their female counterparts. In contrast, the urban middle adult female participants displayed stronger community feeling at the workplace than their male counterparts.

Viewing the group level differences it may be noted that the perception and experience of social interest occur in the socio-cultural context. The group comparisons across gender, ecology, and developmental stages undertaken in this study did indicate the extensive impact of the wide ecological factors on the measures of social interest. They showed that how people envisage social interest changes given to the background to which they belong. Regarding gender difference, it was noted that all factors of social interest explained substantial variation in two aspects of gender. It was also observed that the pattern of social interest in the two ecological settings scraped some commonalities and many differences. Concerning developmental variations, it was observed that with progressing developmental phases the social interest mirrors mixed inclinations (e.g., Mennier & Royce, 1988).

CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that the diverse sides of social interest occupy different aspects of genders, ecologies, and developmental stages. It may be concluded that the background in which people live exerts a major influence on all factors of social interest. The study has noticeable boundaries as its underrepresented nature of sample regarding the demographic features involved in the study. The findings, however, do specify some indicators for childrearing and edifying backgrounds. They propose that there is a necessity to coach social interest across diverse groups, communities, and societies.

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