# Exploring Self-Esteem Disparities Through Inclusivity: A Comparative Study Of College Students In Kamrup Metro And Kamrup District Of Assam

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| ARTICLE INFO | ABSTRACT |
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| | Considering the psychological notion of human beings, it is a basic need of an individual to be self-contentious which is empowered through an unconditional self-evaluation process called self-esteem. College life is a distinct period of expressing the self through identity formation and conceptualizing a worldview resulting in the evaluation of their inner consciousness and the external world. Co-curricular activities are essential elements of academic life that boost self-confidence by emphasizing inclusion and belongingness among students. However, lower caste students frequently experienced a feeling of exclusion in their educational institution or society while comparing them with upper caste. Therefore, the paper is an attempt to look into the level and difference of self-esteem among college students based on their caste and participation in co-curricular activities in Assam. The descriptive survey method was adopted where a sum of 80 undergraduate students from provincialized colleges of Assam were selected randomly. The study revealed that most of the students possessed moderate levels of self-esteem and a few of them possessed a low level of self-esteem but no students were found to have high self-esteem. Further, no significant difference in self-esteem among the college students based on caste and their participation in co-curricular activities was also explored.<br><br>***Keywords***: Self-esteem, caste, co-curricular activities, college students and Assam |

## Introduction

In the present world's complexities, people are concerned about their psychological well-being to live a balanced and purposeful life. Considering the psychological notion of human beings, it is a basic need of an individual to be self-contentious which is empowered through an unconditional self-evaluation process. This process of perceiving and assessing own values, abilities, skills, and behavior is generally known as Self-Esteem. It is a permanent psychological attribute of an individual. Maslow (1987) in his hierarchy of needs, emphasized self-esteem in the fourth level, satisfaction of these needs contributed to self-actualization. Self-esteem emphasizes the psychological fact that the self-respect of an individual is more necessary than the respect gained from others. Self-esteem is a focal element of personality development in assimilation with society and culture (Orth & Robins, 2014) enabling an individual to deal with the challenges of life (Mruk, 2006).

The developmental stage of college students is an inconsistent concept as it neither belongs to the stage of adolescence nor adulthood, hence it is termed differently by different scholars such as young adulthood (Nupur and Mahapatro, 2016), and emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Arnett, (2000) considers 18-25 years of age as emerging adulthood which is a distinct period of expressing the self through identity formation and conceptualizing a worldview enriched by college that is focal in exploring life. In addition, Nupur and Mahapatro (2016) viewed this stage as a conflict between new responsibilities and the inability to fulfill them, resulting in the evaluation of their inner consciousness and the external world leading to the formation of self-esteem. The self-esteem of an individual deteriorates by comparing social identities, views, and abilities as inferior to others as well as often judge themselves by the images of themselves that others form (Srivastava and Agarwal. 2013). In this regard, educational institutions adopt numerous activities to foster student's self-

confidence. Co-curricular activities are another essential element of academic life that makes the students active by reducing stress and improving their social skills. Self-confidence can be boosted by identifying one's strengths and potentialities through various co-curricular activities. Most importantly these activities can emphasize inclusion and belongingness among students.

Moreover, the Sociometer theory refers self-esteem as to ensuring the level of status and acceptance of an individual in his social group fundamental to survive by developing an optimum level of self-esteem. The theory also focuses on one's concern about his or her inclusion in society and worrying about their negative inclusive status which affects one's level of self-esteem (Baumeister & Tice, 1990 as cited in Leary et al., 1995; Singhal and Prakash 2020). Self-esteem is also shaped by social inclusion and socially influential background. Cooley's (1902) Sociological Model emphasizes the influential role of societal components in shaping one's self-esteem, and respect and value earned from society strengthen the self-esteem of youth. Therefore, self-esteem can be identified and differentiated based on the caste of the students of Assam as it was observed by Ray and Das (2023) that caste hierarchy firmly influenced Assamese society. There are primarily four sections available in the society of Assam namely General, Other Backward Classes (OBC), Schedule Caste (SC), and Schedule Tribes (ST).

Previous studies reported that most students have low levels of self-esteem (Mehmood, Ahmad, Hussain and Joseph, 2011; Yu et al., 2022) and a moderate level of self-esteem (Sarma and Bordoloi, 2018; Singhal and Prakash, 2020) among students was also found. It is also evident that self-esteem significantly differs among tribal and non-tribal students (Yadav et al., 2013), similar findings were observed by Ranjan, Gupta and Gujar (2021) among adolescent girls. Reviews support that caste was directly related to self-esteem and social hierarchy contributed to self-esteem. General category students showed higher self-esteem than SC/ST and OBC students (Nupur and Mahapatro, 2016). Apart from that, co-curricular activities are a way of socialization and expression of own abilities and potentialities. It greatly influences self-concept (Kamau, Rintaugu and Bulinda, 2020) and well-being (Hossan, Khan and Hasan, 2021). Muchemi and Kiumi (2022) reported that co-curricular activities have a significant influence on the self-esteem of students and the students from schools having quality co-curricular facilities have better self-esteem than their counterparts. However, no differences in self-esteem and co-curricular activities were also found by Mehmood et al. (2011).

## Significance of the study

College students are the nation builder and future asset of a nation. However, it is also a phase of life when they need to struggle for their own identity and economic sufficiency along with family and social responsibility that make them unrest and anxious. The nature and techniques of handling these issues among college students encourage the researcher to investigate them by associating self-esteem as a psychological notion of oneself that turns a student towards an independent individual. On the other hand, tribal or lower caste students frequently experienced a feeling of exclusion in their educational institution or society while comparing them with upper or general caste. History yielded a domination by the upper caste to schedule caste and schedule tribes. In this context, co-curricular activities can enhance the physical and mental health of the students and indirectly influence their self-esteem by providing them with a feeling of accomplishment and self-satisfaction. There is no study available on this issue in the context of Assam as per the knowledge of the researcher. Therefore, the paper is an attempt to look into the association between caste of the college students and participation in co-curricular activities.

## Objectives

1. To study the level of self-esteem among college students in relation to their caste in Kamrup Metro and Kamrup district of Assam.
2. To study the difference in self-esteem in relation to caste (general, SC, ST, OBC) among college students.
3. To investigate the difference in self-esteem among the students based on participation in co-curricular activities in Kamrup district and Kamrup Metro district of Assam.

### Hypothesis

$H_{01}$ There will be no significant difference in self-esteem in relation to caste (general, SC, ST, OBC)
$H_{02}$ There will be no significant difference in self-esteem among the students based on participation in co-curricular activities in Kamrup district and Kamrup Metro district.

### Delimitations

1. The study is delimited to only 80 students studying in different provincialized colleges of Kamrup and Kamrup Metro district of Assam.
2. Only the undergraduate level is considered for the present study.
3. The data was gathered from the students during the year 2023-24.

## Methods

The current study was quantitative using a descriptive survey method to collect the primary data from college students of Kamrup and Kamrup (Metro) district of Assam.

### Population

All the students of undergraduate level studying in different provincialized colleges of Kamrup and Kamrup Metro district of Assam during the year 2023-24 were considered as population.

### Sample and sampling technique

A sum of 80 undergraduate students from provincialized colleges of Kamrup and Kamrup Metro district of Assam were selected randomly to collect the required data. Four colleges namely Radha Gobinda Baruah College (Kamrup M), Sreenivas Basudev Deorah College (Kamrup M), Dakshin Kamrup College (Kamrup), and Pub Kamrup College (Kamrup) were selected purposefully where two colleges were taken from both the districts. The distribution of the sample is given in the following table-

Table 1.1 Distribution of sample

| District | General | SC | OBC | ST | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kamrup M | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 40 |
| Kamrup | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 40 |
| | | | | Total | 80 |

### Data collection procedure

For this purpose, the investigator adopted the well-known Rosemberg Self-Esteem Scale with a self-structured questionnaire of student's information and distributed the questionnaires among the students by visiting purposefully selected colleges. Frequency, Percentage, Mean, SD, T-test and ANOVA were calculated to analyze the data.

## Results and Discussions

Data were analyzed with the help of the following tables and graphical representations of the values in line with the objectives formulated.

Based on objective no. 1, the following tables (1.2 and 1.3) demonstrated the percentage value of the level of self-esteem in relation to caste in Kamrup Metro and Kamrup district of Assam.

Table 1.2 Distribution of self-esteem responses based on caste in Kamrup Metro district

| Self-esteem | General (%) N=10 | OBC/MOBC (%) N=10 | SC (%) N=10 | ST (%) N=10 | TOTAL N=40 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Low (Below 15) | 1 (10%) | 1 (10%) | 2 (20%) | 1 (10%) | 5 (12.5%) |
| Moderate (15-25) | 9 (90%) | 9 (90%) | 8 (80%) | 9 (90%) | 35 (87.5%) |
| High (Above 25) | - | - | - | - | - |

Figure 1.1 Bar diagram showing the distribution of self-esteem responses based on caste in Kamrup Metro district
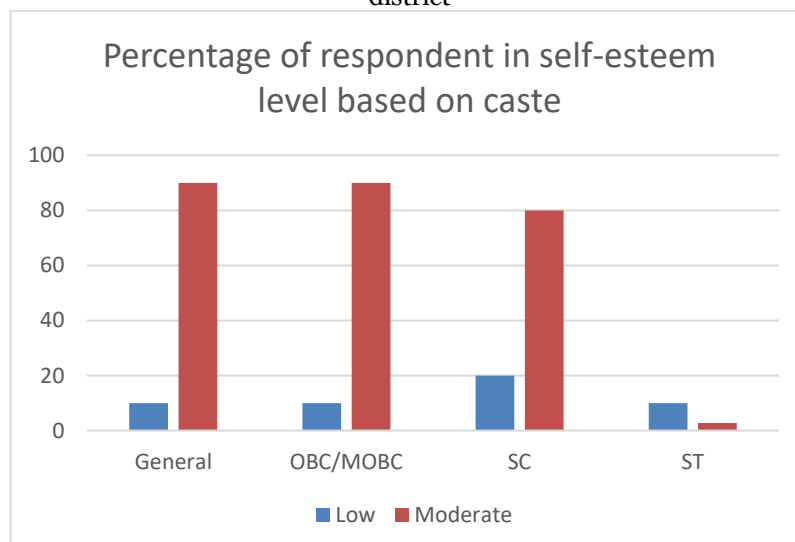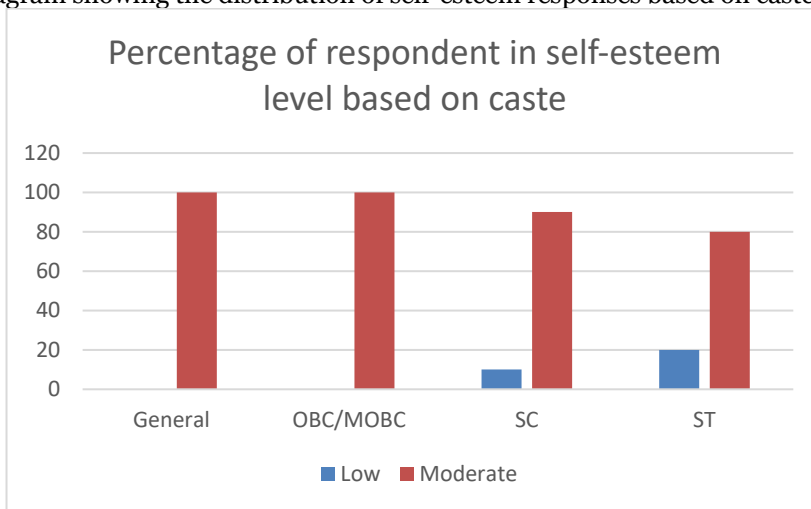
From the table, it was observed that 87.5% of the college students of Kamrup Metro district possess moderate levels of self-esteem and only 12.5% of the students possess a low level of self-esteem but no students have shown high self-esteem. SC category students showed lower self-esteem than that of other castes and the General, ST, and OBC/ MOBC students reported the same level of lower and moderate self-esteem.

Table 1.3 Distribution of self-esteem responses based on caste in Kamrup district

| Self-esteem | General (%) | OBC/MOBC (%) | SC (%) | ST (%) | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Low (Below 15) | - | - | 1 (10%) | 2 (20%) | 3 (7.5%) |
| Moderate (15-25) | 10 (100%) | 10 (100%) | 9 (90%) . | 8 (80%) | 37 (92.5%) |
| High (Above 25) | - | - | - | - | - |

Figure 1.2. Bar diagram showing the distribution of self-esteem responses based on caste in Kamrup district



From the above table, it was observed that 92.5% of the college students of Kamrup district showed moderate levels of self-esteem and only 7.5% of students possessed lower levels of self-esteem but no students had high self-esteem. All the general and OBC/MOBC category students showed moderate levels of self-esteem, however, 90% of SC students and 80% of ST students reported moderate levels of self-esteem.

The results of both districts can also be related to the findings of Sarma and Bordoloi (2018), and Singhal and Prakash (2020) who measured moderate levels of self-esteem among the students. Furthermore, the result of the caste-wise distribution of students was similar to the findings of Nupur and Mahapatro (2016) that General category students showed higher self-esteem than SC/ST and OBC students. From both tables (1.2 and 1.3) it was observed that the self-esteem level of students in the Kamrup district was better than the students in the Kamrup Metro district of Assam. It may be due to the migration effect of the students as most of the students of Kamrup Metro district have come from other places of the state, hence associated with some adjustment issues or feeling of solitary from their families. While comparing within the castes, students in all categories of caste in Kamrup district showed better self-esteem levels except the ST students.

To analyze objective no. 2, the following table portrays the ANOVA measurement of the difference in self-esteem score in relation to their caste (general, SC, ST, and OBC)

Table 1.4 ANOVA results of self-esteem difference among college students in relation to their caste (general, SC, ST, OBC)

| Variable | Sum of square | Mean square | df | F | Sig | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Between groups | 43.1 | 14.36667 | 3 | 1.61 | 0.05 | Not significant |
| Within groups | 676.1 | 8.896053 | 76 | | | |

From the above table, it was observed that the sum of squares between groups and within groups are 43.1 and 676.1 respectively and the Mean squares are 14.36667 and 8.896053 respectively. It is also observed that the P value (o. 192893) is greater than the significance value (0.05) so the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, it can be concluded that there would be no significant difference in self-esteem in relation to their caste (general, SC, ST, OBC). Considering this result another study by Thaiparambil, Chamakalayil, Orth, Arx and Gaab (2013) explored no mediation effect of caste in self-esteem among students.

Considering the nature of Objective No. 3, a t-test was calculated to test the difference in self-esteem scores of college students based on their responses on whether they participated in co-curricular activities or not and presented in the following table

Table 1.5 Results of t-test among the college students based on their participation in co-curricular activities

| Variable | N | Mean | S.D | df | t | P value | Interpretation |
|----------|---|------|-----|----|----|---------|----------------|
| Participation in co-curricular activities | 44 | 19.33 | 3.24 | 78 | 1.99 | 0.21 | Not significant (0.05) |
| Not participating in co-curricular activities | 36 | 18.51 | 2.34 | | | | |

From table 1.5. The mean score of self-esteem among the students who participated in co-curricular activities is 19.3 with SD 3.24 and the mean score of self-esteem among the students who do not participate in co-curricular activities is 18.51 with SD 2.34. Again, the value of the t-test was found to be 0.21 which was greater than the significance level of 0.05. The result compelled the researcher to accept null hypothesis no 2, thus it could be concluded that there would be no significant difference in self-esteem among the college students based on participation in co-curricular activities in Kamrup and Kamrup Metro district of Assam. The result was supported by Mehmood et al. (2011) who explored no difference in self-esteem and co-curricular activities among students. It can be added that though students reported participation in co-curricular activities most of the time they are involved in social media so cannot be fully involved in co-curricular activities organized by the college.

## Findings

The major findings of the paper are
1. 87.5% of the college students of Kamrup Metro district possessed a moderate level of self-esteem and only 12.5% possessed a low level of self-esteem. SC category students showed slightly lower self-esteem than that of other castes and the General, ST, and OBC/ MOBC students reported the same level of self-esteem. On the other hand, 92.5% of college students in the Kamrup district showed moderate levels of self-esteem and only 7.5% of the students possessed lower levels of self-esteem but no students were found to have high self-esteem. All the general and OBC/MOBC category students showed moderate levels of self-esteem, however, 90% of SC students and 80% of ST students reported moderate levels of self-esteem.
2. There was no significant difference in self-esteem among the college students in relation to caste (general, SC, ST, and OBC/MOBC).
3. There was no significant difference in self-esteem among the college students based on participation in co-curricular activities in the Kamrup and Kamrup Metro districts of Assam.

## Suggestions and Conclusion

The reservation policy of India aims to provide equity among all social sections so that their experience of mistreatment, and domination can be reduced to survive with the same respect and place in the society, therefore there exists no huge difference of self-esteem among all the castes. Student's self-esteem is found between low and moderate levels so there is a need to take some necessary agenda in the college education to strengthen their self-esteem towards the higher level. The study highlights the need to address the disparities in self-esteem levels among college students based on their caste. Educational institutions should be more vigilant in creating an inclusive environment that promotes equality, discourages discrimination, and fosters a sense of belonging for all students, irrespective of their caste background. While co-curricular activities are recognized for their role in enhancing self-confidence, the findings suggest that their impact may not be uniformly distributed across different caste groups. Educational institutions should pay attention to the design and implementation of co-curricular programs to ensure they are inclusive and accessible to all students. Educational policymakers should consider integrating programs that specifically target the enhancement of self-esteem, especially among those who are more vulnerable to feelings of exclusion based on their caste. Therefore, establishing and promoting mental health support services within educational institutions such as counseling services and workshops, mentorship programs that focus on building resilience, coping mechanisms, and strategies for building a positive self-image with overall well-being and overcoming challenges related to caste-based discrimination

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