Grit's Silent Architect: Role of Social Support for Civil Services Aspirants

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Social support, encompassing assistance from family, friends, and significant others, is vital for individuals navigating the journey of civil service preparation. Examining the role of social support among civil service aspirants offers insights into its impact on resilience, perseverance, and overall well-being within this challenging pursuit. The sample comprises 60% males (N = 318) and 40% females (N = 212), aged 21 to 34 years, with a mean age of 26.51 ± 3.91. Participants were selected using purposive sampling targeting civil service aspirants. The research utilized the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) and the Short Grit Scale (Grit-S). Bivariate correlation, linear regression, and multiple regression analyses examined the associations between social support (with domains) and grit. Overall social support (r =.638, β =.638, p <.001) with its domains: significant others (r =.659, β =.560, p <.001) and family subscales (r =.527, β =.209, p <.001) positively predict grit, consistent with bivariate correlations. However, the Friends subscale, while positively correlated in bivariate analysis, shows a negative prediction for Grit (r =.457, β = -.057, p =.287) and lacks statistical significance in multiple regression. In conclusion, this study contributes to the understanding of grit among civil service aspirants by highlighting the significance of social support.

Keywords: *Social Support, Grit, Family, Friend, Significant Other, Perseverance, Civil Services Aspirants.*

Introduction

In recent years, the pursuit of a career in civil services has become an increasingly competitive and demanding aspiration in India. As individuals navigate the rigorous selection processes and extensive preparation required for these examinations, understanding the psychological factors that contribute to their resilience and perseverance is of utmost importance. One such factor that has received significant attention in contemporary research is the role of social support in fostering grit among civil service aspirants.

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Researchers have pointed out that cultural and societal factors play a crucial role in shaping individuals' perceptions of social support, thereby influencing their grit levels (Feeney & Collins, 2015). Within the Indian cultural framework, where familial and peer support often intertwine with aspirations for civil service roles, understanding the dynamics of social support becomes necessary. Grit, characterized by perseverance and passion for long-term goals, is considered a critical determinant of success in challenging pursuits. Perceived social support is the level at which a person feels like they are cared for by others, have assistance when needed, and are part of a social network. (Cohen & Syme, 1985). The significance of social support, encompassing emotional, instrumental, and informational assistance from one's social network, in shaping an aspirant's grit has emerged as a salient area of investigation.

Recent studies on grit have highlighted the importance of non-cognitive factors in achieving long-term objectives (Duckworth & Gross's, 2014). Concurrently, research has specifically explored the influence of social support on academic perseverance, highlighting its role in mitigating stress and enhancing resilience (Li & Chu, 2019). As civil service aspirants often grapple with high-pressure environments, understanding how perceived social support influences their grit becomes crucial for devising effective support systems and interventions. By synthesizing findings from recent research papers and incorporating perspectives from relevant literature, this study aims to shed light on the relationship between perceived social support and grit in the context of civil service aspirants in India.

The concept of perceived social support, as defined by Cohen and Syme (1985), captures the individual's sense of being cared for by others and belonging to a social network, irrespective of whether this support is tangible or merely perceived. Furthermore, the facets of social stimulation and social contact contribute dimensions to the broader construct of perceived social support. Social stimulation involves activities that offer relief from monotony, break routines, and provide emotional respite, whereas social contact centers around building connections through friendship, meeting new people, enjoying social interactions, and engaging with amicable individuals (Prins et al., 2009).

In this context of social constructs, the multidimensional nature of perceived social support becomes apparent, extending beyond a mere sense of care to encompass interconnected concepts that shape individuals' experiences within their social situation. Understanding these dimensions is important for unscrambling the dynamics that influence the well-being and resilience of individuals within societal frameworks. One notable study validated and extended the Grit framework by demonstrating its predictive validity in diverse settings, including military training, workplace performance, and academic achievement. The research reinforced the conceptualization of grit as a predictor of long-term goal achievement, emphasizing the enduring nature of effort and sustained interest as crucial elements in success across different contexts (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014). Previous research has emphasized the comprehensive nature of grit, highlighting its relatedness but separability from self-control (Duckworth and Gross, 2014). Social support encompasses the emotional, informational, and instrumental assistance individuals receive from their social networks (Barrera, 1986; Thoits, 2011).

Research has highlighted the impact of positive social relationships on overall well-being (Diener & Seligman, 2002). As civil service aspirants navigate a challenging and competitive landscape, the support they receive from family, friends, mentors, and peers could play a vital role in shaping their grit. Furthermore, studies (Harms et al., 2018) have emphasized the importance of resilience and well-being in academic pursuits, suggesting that a support system may enhance an individual's ability to persist and thrive in the face of adversity. By synthesizing insights from these important works, this research seeks to provide an understanding of how social support serves as a predictor of grit among civil service aspirants. Through empirical investigation and analysis, we aim to contribute valuable insights that can inform strategies for fostering grit and resilience in individuals pursuing success in the civil service. Investigating these connections between perceived social support and grit, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the psychosocial determinants that influence the persistence and success of civil service aspirants in India. The findings of this study hold the potential to inform educational and counseling interventions designed to enhance the resilience and grit of individuals steering the challenging landscape of civil service examinations.

Therefore, the focus of the present study is to examine the predictive relationship between perceived social support (predictor) and grit (outcome) in civil service aspirants. It was hypothesized that perceived social support (or the specific domain of self-concept) would predict grit in civil service aspirants.

Objectives

- To study the relationship between social support and grit for civil service aspirants.
- To study the relationship between social support dimensions (significant others subscale, family subscale, and friends subscale) and grit for civil service aspirants.
- To predict grit from social support for civil service aspirants.
- To predict grit from social support dimensions (significant others subscale, family subscale, and friends subscale) for civil service aspirants.

Hypotheses

H$_1$: There will be a positive relationship between social support and grit for civil service aspirants.

H$_2$: There will be a positive relationship between social support dimensions (significant others subscale, family subscale, and friends subscale) and grit in civil service aspirants.

H$_3$: There will be a positive prediction of grit from social support for civil service aspirants.

H$_4$: There will be a positive prediction of grit from social support dimensions (significant others subscale, family subscale, and friends subscale) in civil service aspirants.

Method

Research Design

In the current study, a non-experimental design is employed, specifically opting for correlational research to explore the correlations and employing regression analyses to explore the relationship between perceived social support (considered as the predictor variable) and grit (serving as the criterion variable). This chosen methodology seeks to examine the interplay between perceived social support and grit, providing a comprehensive understanding of their associations and predictive implications.

Sample

The sample size comprises of = *530* civil service aspirants, among which N = *318* (60%) are male and N = 212 (40%) are female. The sample size was chosen on the basis of the availability and response rate that were drawn from the population characteristics. The age range of participants is 21 to 34 years old, with a mean age of 26.51 ± 3.91. Participants were approached using the purposive sampling technique, i.e., only civil service aspirants were targeted.

Measures

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS):

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet et al., 1988) is a 12-item questionnaire measuring perceived social support. Respondents rate statements on a 7-point Likert scale (1=very strongly disagree, 7=very strongly agree). The scale has three subscales—family, friends, and significant others—assessing support from different sources. With a reliability of 0.88, MSPSS demonstrates high internal consistency. Widely used in research, it provides insights into individuals' perceptions of support across various domains, aiding studies on mental health, well-being, and interpersonal relationships.

The Short Grit Scale (Grit-S):

The Short Grit Scale (Grit-S) (Duckworth *et al.,* 2007) assesses grittiness through 12 items rated on a five-point Likert scale (1= not like me at all to 5= very much like me). It measures two components: consistency of interest and persistence of effort. The scale demonstrates high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85) and assured validity, offering an efficient tool to evaluate individuals' passion and perseverance toward long-term goals.

Procedure

Samples were drawn from civil service aspirants across India. Initially, more than 1000 civil service aspirants were contacted individually and from various coaching institutes. Out of which, 750 people agreed to participate and provide their consent. After excluding missing responses and outliers, a final sample of N = 530 was found to be good enough for inclusion in the analysis.

The choice of these aspirants was based on the understanding and criteria of the researcher. Basically, therefore, the purposive sampling method was employed for data collection. Personal contact was established with each of the aspirants from whom samples were drawn, and assistance was sought for the administration of the questionnaires. The questionnaires were personally taken to the contact in each of the aspirants and were instructed to adhere strictly to the ethical principles in research (which include voluntary participation, anonymity, etc.) while administering the questionnaires.

At the initial level, participants were introduced with an informed consent form in which they were briefed about the research purpose and their volunteer participation. Participants were provided with the assurance of data confidentiality and the right to refuse or withdraw from the research at any step. After the verbal and written consent of participants, they were introduced to the demographic form and research measures. After the process of data collection, scoring was done by following the standard measures of particular scales.

Results

The objectives of the present research study were to examine the relationship between social support and grit among civil service aspirants. The findings of this investigation are presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Table 1
Coefficient of Correlation in Grit and Social Support (N=530)

	Significant Others Subscale	Family Subscale	Friends Subscale	Social Support	Grit
Significant Others Subscale	1	.646**	.628**	.901**	.659**
Family Subscale		1	.777**	.877**	.527**
Friends Subscale			1	.873**	.457**
Social Support				1	.638**
Grit					1

**. *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed);*

Table 1 depicts the relationship between social support and grit. The outcome of the present research reveals a significant positive correlation (r =.63, p<.000) between social support and grit. The results also show a significant positive correlation between Social Support's three dimensions, the Significant *Others Subscale* (r =.65, p<.000), the Family *Subscale* (r =.52, < p<.000), and the Friends *Subscale* (r =.45, p<.000), and Grit.

Table 2
Regression analyses of Social Support and Grit (N=530)

Predictors	B	SE	β	T	p
Constant	21.23	.446		47.63	< .001
Social Support	.138	.007	.638	19.01	< .001
R²	.407				
F	362.55				<.001

***Dependent variable:** Grit;* **Predictor:** *Social Support (Constant)*

Table 2 illustrates that social support emerged as the significant predictor against grit with R2 =.407, F = 362.55, p<.001. The findings establish social support as a significant predictor, with a 40.7% variance of grit in civil service aspirants. Social support (B =.138, β =.638, p<.001) was found to be significantly positively correlated with grit. The results reveal that there is a there is a significant positive correlation between social support and grit, which provides us with an understanding of the fact that civil service aspirants with high social support exhibit a higher level of grit.

Table 3
Regression analyses of Social Support subscales with Grit (N=530)

Predictors	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	22.66	.520		43.56	< .001
Significant others Subscale	.240	.019	.560	12.78	< .001
Family Subscale	.150	.039	.209	3.85	< .001
Friends Subscale	-.038	.035	-.057	-1.06	.287
R²	.453				
F	145.21				< .001

***Dependent variable:** Grit;* **Predictor:** *Family, Friends, and Significant others subscales (Constant)*

The results in Table 3 show that Social Support's two dimensions emerged as significant predictors against Grit with R^2 =.453, F = 145.21, p<.001. The findings establish Social Support's dimensions as significant predictors, with a 45.3% variance in Grit among civil service aspirants. Social support's dimensions: family scale (B =.150, β =.209, p <.001) and significant other scale (B =.240, β =.560, p <.05) were found to be significantly positively correlated with gritty. However, the Friends Subscale was found to be a non-significant predictor of grit (B = -.038, β = -.057, p =.287).

Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the predictable relationship between social support and grit among civil service aspirants. The findings of this research support the formulated hypothesis and highlight the point that overall social support, with its domains: Significant others and family subscalespositively predict grit, consistent with bivariate correlations.However, the Friends subscale, while positively correlated in bivariate analysis, shows a negative prediction for Grit and lacks statistical significance in multiple regression.

In regards to previous literature emphasizing the positive impact of social support on individuals' resilience, determination, and overall ability to persevere through challenges, this aligns with the present findings (Hjemdal *et al.*, 2011; Eskresis-Winkler *et al.,* 2014). The findings offer compelling insights into the relationship between social support and grit among civil service aspirants in India. The data revealed a positive correlation between perceived social support and grit, indicating the significance of social support networks in shaping the perseverance and passion of individuals steering the challenge of civil service examinations. Moreover, supporting evidence also aligns with and extends the work of researchers in related domains. Notably, a study investigating the role of social support in academic persistence found similar associations between perceived support and students' grit (Li, Han, & Sun, 2018; Johnson, 2007). Social support will make an individual feel calm, and individuals with a sufficient amount of social support will take a lot of advice on how to deal with difficulties (Alarcon, Edwards, & Menke, 2011; Hale, Hannum, & Espelage, 2005). Moreover, individuals with a high level of grit will maximize their effort and be consistent with the activity that they attend (Datu, Valdez, & King, 2015). With a higher level of grit and social support, individuals will feel calmer, show persistence when doing their studies, and believe that other individuals will deliver their support whenever needed. Further analysis also aligns with previous literature (Qurratuaini& Saraswati, 2022) in determining how social support from family contributes the highest percentage, higher than social support from friends in academic engagement.

The bivariate correlations for other sub-domains of social support further indicate an initial positive connection between social support and grit. Interestingly, while Significant Others*,* Family Support,and the Friends Support subscales positively correlate with Grit, the Friends Support subscale emerged as a negative predictor and was not statistically significant. This finding deviates from bivariate correlation analyses, where all social support domains reflect significant positive correlations with grit. The negative prediction regarding friends' support demands careful consideration. Considering Significant Others and Family Support role in Grit, Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) postulates that individual seek proximity to and support from attachment figures (e.g., romantic partners and family members) in times of stress or adversity. The emotional bond and sense of security provided by significant others and family members can buffer against the stressors associated with competitive examinations, thereby fostering resilience and grit in aspirants (Feeney & Collins, 2015). Social support theory suggests that support from significant others and family members positively influences coping mechanisms and psychological well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Research suggests that individuals preparing for exams derive substantial emotional and instrumental support from their romantic partners and family members, including encouragement, assistance with daily tasks, and a conducive study environment (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010). Resource theory proposes that social support provides individuals with tangible and intangible resources to cope with stressors (Thoits, 2011). Significant others and family members often offer financial assistance, practical help with household chores, and understanding during times of heightened stress, thereby enabling aspirants to allocate more time and energy to exam preparation (House, 1981). According to Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model (1984), the appraisal of stressors and the availability of coping resources influence individuals' adjustment outcomes. Significant others and family members play a crucial role in

appraising the demands of civil service preparation positively and facilitating adaptive coping strategies through their unwavering support and belief in the aspirants' abilities (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). Social identity theory suggests that individuals derive a sense of identity and belongingness from their social groups, such as romantic partners and family members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The encouragement and reinforcement of aspirants' identity as diligent and capable individuals by significant others and family members bolster their self-concept and perseverance in the face of challenges encountered during exam preparation (Jetten, Haslam, & Haslam, 2012).

Taking perceived support from friends into account, research suggests that the effectiveness of social support depends on the perceived closeness of the relationship (Cutrona & Russell, 1987). Individuals preparing for civil services exams might perceive their friends as too distant or disconnected from the challenges they face in this highly competitive environment, thus reducing the perceived efficacy of their support. Competitive examinations like civil services often foster a sense of rivalry among peers, potentially undermining the supportive nature of friendships (Jetten, Haslam, & Haslam, 2012). Individuals may hesitate to seek support from friends due to concerns about revealing weaknesses or facing judgment in a competitive setting. Social support can be classified into emotional and instrumental (or task) support. While friends may excel at providing emotional encouragement, they may lack the expertise or resources to offer practical assistance with exam preparation (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992). As civil service aspirants require both emotional bolstering and tangible resources for preparation, friends might not fulfill the latter aspect adequately. People who have faced similar difficulties or circumstances are frequently better at providing social support (Thoits, 2011). Friends who are not engaged in civil service preparation may struggle to empathize fully with the unique stressors and demands faced by aspirants, thereby limiting the quality of support they can offer.

Thus, the present findings contribute to the existing literature by providing evidence that social support significantly predicts grit among civil service aspirants. The predictive nature of social support in shaping grit aligns with theoretical frameworks proposing that individuals are more likely to persevere in the face of challenges when they perceive a support system.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current study sheds light on the role of social support in the cultivation of grit among civil service aspirants. The positive correlation and predictive nature of social support in relation to grit underscore the need for holistic support structures to foster resilience and perseverance among individuals aspiring to serve in the civil services sector in India. These results add to the growing body of research on how important social support is for building resilience and determination in a wide range of educational and occupational settings. They also lay the groundwork for targeted interventions that can improve the health and success of aspirants on their difficult path.

However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of the present study, such as the reliance on self-report measures and the cross-sectional nature of the data. It is also essential to acknowledge the complex interplay of cultural, societal, and individual factors that may influence the relationship between social support and grit. Future researchers should explore these aspects further to refine interventions that are culturally sensitive and contextually relevant. As well, future research could employ longitudinal designs and incorporate qualitative methodologies to provide an understanding of the dynamic interplay between social support and grit in the unique context of civil service aspirants in India.

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