



The Influence of Stereotype Threat In Self-Esteem Among University Tribal Students

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Abstract

Stereotype threat refers to the fear of confirming negative stereotypes about one's social group, which can negatively affect psychological functioning and academic experiences. Students from tribal communities often face social stigma, low expectations, and identity-based pressure within higher education settings, making them particularly vulnerable to stereotype threat. The present study examines the influence of stereotype threat on self-esteem among tribal university students.

The study employed a quantitative correlational research design. A sample of 200 tribal students enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programs at a university in Madhya Pradesh participated in the study. Standardized measures of stereotype threat and self-esteem were used to collect data. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis were applied to examine the relationship between the variables.

The results indicated that participants experienced relatively high levels of stereotype threat and moderate levels of self-esteem. Correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between stereotype threat and self-esteem, indicating that higher levels of stereotype threat were associated with lower self-esteem. Regression analysis further revealed that stereotype threat had a significant predictive value for self-esteem among tribal university students.

The findings suggest that stereotype threat plays an important role in shaping the psychological well-being of tribal students by undermining their sense of self-worth. The study highlights the need for identity-safe and inclusive educational environments that reduce stereotype-based pressures and support the self-esteem of tribal students in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Stereotype threat is best understood as a situational predicament in which individuals fear that their actions may confirm negative stereotypes about their social group. This fear can lead to increased anxiety and reduced cognitive functioning, ultimately impairing performance. (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat is a psychological phenomenon. It is composed of two different concepts, Stereotype and threat, both of which have different meanings. A stereotype refers to a certain or biased belief or fixed assumption about a social group or community, while threat can be defined as the sense of fear or apprehension.

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The term stereotype threat was introduced by psychologists Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson in 1995. Famous Psychologists Steel and Aronson in the year of 1995 found that African American students performed worse in comparison to American students when their race was emphasized before the test. This investigation became the key factor behind the worsened performance by the African American students, and the Stereotype threat phenomenon was identified. Stereotype threat refers to the situational fear of confirming a negative stereotype about one's social group (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Introduction to Self-Efficacy

Self-esteem is one of the most central constructs in psychology and refers to an individual's overall evaluation of their worth, value, and competence (Rosenberg, 1965). It encompasses both cognitive judgments and emotional responses individuals hold about themselves and plays a significant role in shaping psychological functioning. High self-esteem is associated with confidence, resilience, and positive emotional adjustment, enabling individuals to approach challenges with optimism and persistence (Orth & Robins, 2014). Individuals with high self-esteem are more likely to cope effectively with stress, maintain healthier social relationships, and demonstrate stronger motivation across academic and personal domains.

In contrast, low self-esteem is characterized by doubt, insecurity, and negative self-perception (Baumeister et al., 2003). Individuals with low self-esteem tend to experience greater anxiety, avoidance behaviors, difficulty coping with failure, and heightened sensitivity to social evaluation. These emotional and cognitive vulnerabilities can negatively affect academic performance, mental health, and social adjustment.(Sowislo et al., 2013)

Research consistently demonstrates that low self-esteem contributes to a higher risk of depression, stress, and social withdrawal (Mann et al., 2004).

Self-esteem develops through interactions between personal experiences and social influences. Critical sources include family relationships, peer acceptance, academic achievement, and social feedback (Harter, 2012). Supportive environments, positive reinforcement, and success experiences help strengthen self-

esteem, while criticism, rejection, and negative social labeling undermine it. In educational settings, students' self-esteem is shaped through continuous evaluations, peer comparisons, and feelings of belongingness. Students who receive positive affirmation tend to internalize a stronger sense of self-worth, whereas repeated experiences of failure or negative feedback can erode self-esteem over time.

Literature Review

Stereotype Threat and Its Psychological Impact

Stereotype threat has been widely recognized as a psychological mechanism that affects academic and social outcomes among stigmatized groups. An individual who fears of being judged based on their pre-existing or social identity, based on stereotypes about their social group, often leads to perceived anxiety and fear, cognitive interference, and reduced task performance (Steele et al., 2002a; Walton & Spencer, 2009). This psychological burden explains an important aspect, but not all of the race gap in academic achievement. Mostly based on the gender gap in mathematical performance. Stigma is a social phenomenon that creates a prolonged impact on the individual who experiences it. It is linked to poor mental health, social exclusion, and reduced access to opportunities in education and employment. (Steele et al., 1998; O'Brien et al., 2005).The fundamental theoretical work done by Goffman in 1963 describes stigma as a socially calumniate attribute that leads to social devaluation in a specific social context with the identity (Goffman et.al.,1963).

In the educational setting, Stigma acts like a stereotype threat to individuals, and their socially negative identity leads them to underperform in the educational setting. Stereotype threat is rooted in social identity theory and self-evaluation theories(Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to an individual's global evaluation of their self-worth and competence. It has a major contribution to motivation, adjustment, and mental health. Because stereotype threat can undermine feelings of competence and belonging, it logically poses a threat to self-esteem. When individuals repeatedly internalize or experience reminders of negative group stereotypes, they may

begin to doubt their abilities, feel less valued or accepted, and eventually experience lower self-esteem.

Self-Esteem and Its Relationship to Threat

Empirical work on the direct relationship between stereotype threat and self-esteem is more limited than research on performance, but several studies illustrate relevant pathways. For example, Wang (2018) found that stereotype threat impacted performance among participants and that the effect was moderated by self-esteem—that is, individuals with higher self-esteem experienced somewhat different effects than those with lower self-esteem. More recently, Qing (2024) found that self-esteem and social value orientation moderated how individuals responded to stereotype threat in terms of avoidance of social comparison. These findings suggest that self-esteem both influences and is influenced by stereotype threat processes.

In higher education settings, stereotype threat can reduce domain-specific self-confidence (for example, academic or STEM self-efficacy) and over time may generalize into broader self-esteem erosion, although direct longitudinal work is scarce. Given that university students from marginalized groups often face both elevated threat exposure and institutional barriers, examining self-esteem as an outcome is justified.

As a mechanism, stereotype threat instigates anxiety, self-monitoring, and distraction, all of which can significantly decrease performance and increase negative self-appraisal. (Schmader, Johns & Forbes, 2008) This psychological effect reduces perceived competence and belonging, which are completely contradictory of self-esteem (Owens, 2011). Over repeated exposure to stereotype threat individual disidentification in the process of protecting self-esteem (Owens, 2011).

Much of the stereotype threat literature focuses on performance in educational settings—e.g., gender gaps in math, racial/ethnic minority underperformance in standardized tests, and socioeconomic status effects (Owens, 2011). These studies consistently show that when a negative stereotype is activated, participants from the stereotyped group perform worse, hold greater anxiety, and show reduced domain-identification—all of which can be antecedents to self-esteem effects (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Harrison, Stevens, Monty & Coakley (2006) studied lower income college students exposed to socioeconomic stereotype threat and found increased test anxiety and reduced academic identification, but no immediate effect on state self-esteem. This suggests that self-esteem may be more resistant in the short term, or participants may protect global self-esteem via disengagement (i.e., reducing academic identification) rather than immediate drops in self-worth. Over time, though, sustained disengagement can lead to broader self-esteem decline.

Marginalized and Tribal Students

While many studies have been conducted in Western university contexts (often focusing on race/gender), fewer have explicitly examined students from tribal or marginalized ethnic groups in India or similar contexts. However, extant literature suggests that caste, tribal status, and socioeconomic marginalization operate in analogous ways to racial/ethnic stereotype threat, for students from tribal backgrounds, stereotype threat may be compounded by stigma, institutional under-resourcing, and weak belonging, making them vulnerable to lower self-esteem via the same mechanisms.

Research gap and rationale of the study

The concept of stereotype threat is widely recognized for its negative effects on performance, academic achievement, motivation, and cognitive functioning. Some studies have also reported that stereotype threat directly influences self-esteem, with evidence extending beyond university settings. Much of the existing research focuses on how stereotype threat reduces cognitive performance during specific tasks. Only a few studies in India have examined the role of stereotype threat and its relationship with self-esteem within university environments. The present study has been conducted in a real educational setting, offering important insights into how students from different social groups experience identity-based vulnerability. This vulnerability, when exposed to stereotype threat, can negatively impact their self-esteem. Given that tribal students often face structural disadvantages, negative stereotyping, lack of representation, and institutional barriers, they may be more vulnerable to lowered self-confidence and decreased sense of belonging—all of which are known precursors to reduced self-

esteem. Yet, there is little systematic evidence exploring whether stereotype threat directly contributes to diminished self-esteem among these students, or how such effects may differ from those observed in other demographic groups.

OBJECTIVE

- 1) To examine the extent to which stereotype threat predicts self-esteem among university students belonging to tribal communities.
- 2) To investigate the levels of stereotype threat in self-esteem among university among tribal students.

Hypotheses

H₁ There will be a significant relationship between stereotype threat and self-esteem among tribal university students.

H₂ Stereotype threat will significantly predict self-esteem among tribal university students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between stereotype threat and self-esteem among university students.

Participants

Sample

The sample of the present study consisted of 200 university students, from Indira Gandhi National Tribal University Amarkantak M.P including both male and female participants. Students were enrolled in various undergraduate and postgraduate programs across different departments of the university. The inclusion of both genders and multiple academic programs allowed for a more diverse and representative set of responses regarding stereotype threat and self-esteem. The study included only Scheduled Tribe undergraduate and postgraduate students of Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak. Students from non-tribal backgrounds and those not enrolled in UG or PG programs were excluded.

Sampling Technique

A convenience sampling method was used, as participants were drawn from those readily

available and willing to participate within the university setting.

Tool / Questionnaire Description

The study employed four standardized psychological tools to measure self-esteem and stereotype threat among students from a tribal community. Details of each instrument are described below.

Self-esteem was assessed using a standardized Self-Esteem Scale, such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale or a comparable validated instrument, which is widely recognized for measuring an individual's conscious and global evaluation of self-worth. The scale consists of 10 items designed to capture perceptions of self-acceptance, confidence, and personal value. Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree," allowing participants to express the extent of their agreement with statements reflecting positive or negative feelings about the self. Higher total scores on the scale reflect higher levels of high self-esteem, whereas lower scores indicate diminished self-esteem. This measure provides a reliable and direct assessment of how individuals consciously evaluate their own sense of worth.

Self-esteem encompasses several core dimensions that reflect an individual's conscious evaluation of personal worth. It includes self-acceptance, which refers to the ability to acknowledge and value oneself despite strengths or weaknesses. It also involves self-confidence, representing the belief in one's abilities and judgment. Another important dimension is the feeling of competence, which captures the perception of being capable, effective, and able to meet challenges. Finally, self-esteem reflects overall satisfaction with oneself, indicating a general sense of contentment and positive regard toward one's identity and personal qualities.

Reliability and Validity

The scale has been widely validated across diverse cultural contexts and demonstrates strong internal consistency, with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = .88$.

Stereotype Threat Questionnaire -

The Stereotype Questionnaire used in the present study was specifically adapted to assess the extent to which tribal students endorse positive and negative stereotypes related to their own social

Stereotype Threat In Self-Esteem

group. The tool contains statements representing both desirable and undesirable traits commonly associated with tribal communities. The positive stereotype dimension includes socially valued characteristics such as being hardworking, intelligent, responsible, and cooperative. In contrast, the negative stereotype dimension reflects undesirable attributes such as being less capable, dependent, undisciplined, or unreliable.

Participants rate each item on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), indicating the extent to which they believe each characteristic applies to members of the tribal community. Separate scores are computed for positive and negative stereotypes, resulting in two independent stereotype scores: Tribal Positive Stereotype Score and Tribal Negative Stereotype Score.

This adapted questionnaire provides a focused understanding of how tribal students perceive the stereotypes associated with their own group and helps reveal broader patterns of stereotype endorsement within tribal populations.

RESULTS

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between self-esteem and stereotype threat among university students. To begin, descriptive statistics were computed to understand the central tendency and variability of the major variables. Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation for self-esteem and stereotype threat.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 200)

Variable	Mean	SD
Self-Esteem	50.00	12.00
Stereotype Threat	97.93	18.93

Descriptive statistics were computed for the study variables using data from 200 tribal college students. The results indicated that the mean score for self-esteem was 50.00 with a standard deviation of 12.00, suggesting that students generally reported a moderate level of self-esteem with a moderate amount of variability in their responses. In contrast, stereotype threat had a mean score of 97.93 and a standard deviation of 18.93, indicating that students experienced a relatively high level of stereotype threat, with greater variability across

individuals compared to self-esteem. Overall, these findings show that while self-esteem levels among tribal students tend to cluster around the moderate range, perceptions of stereotype threat are considerably higher and more widely dispersed.

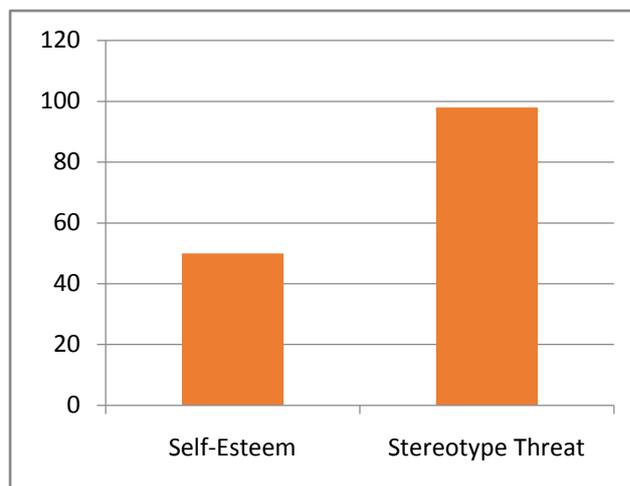


Figure 1: Mean Analysis of figure

The descriptive analysis indicated that participants obtained an average self-esteem score of 50.00 with a standard deviation of 12.00, suggesting moderate variability in self-worth among the sample. The mean stereotype threat score was 97.93 with a standard deviation of 18.93, showing comparatively higher variability in the extent to which students experienced stereotype-related concerns.

Table 2: Summary of the correlation analysis of stereotype threat and Self-Esteem

Variable	Self-Esteem (SE)
Stereo Type Threat	$r = -.484$

To assess the relationship between self-esteem and stereotype threat, a Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was conducted. The correlation coefficient revealed a significant negative relationship between self-esteem and stereotype threat ($r = -.484, p < .001$). This finding indicates that higher levels of stereotype threat are associated with lower levels of self-esteem. In other words, students who experienced greater stereotype-related pressure and identity-based concerns tended to report poorer evaluations of their self-worth.

Stereotype Threat In Self-Esteem

Taken together, these findings suggest that stereotype threat plays a meaningful role in shaping students' self-esteem levels within academic settings. The results support the hypothesis that stereotype-based pressures negatively affect students' psychological functioning.

Table 3: Regression analysis of Self-Esteem as a predictor of stereotype threat among Tribal College Students

Predictor	B	R ²	F	p
Stereotype Threat	-484	.234	60.454	.000

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether stereotype threat significantly predicts self-esteem among university students. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 3.

The regression model was found to be statistically significant, $F(1, 198) = 60.454, p < .001$, indicating that stereotype threat contributes meaningfully to explaining variations in self-esteem.

The Regression Sum of Squares ($SSR = 6703.580$) reflects the amount of variance in self-esteem that is explained by stereotype threat, whereas the Residual Sum of Squares ($SSE = 21955.540$) represents the variance that remains unexplained by the model. The Total Sum of Squares ($SST = 28659.119$) indicates the overall variability in self-esteem within the sample.

The Mean Square value for the regression ($MS = 6703.580$) was substantially larger than the Mean Square residual ($MS = 110.887$), demonstrating that the model accounts for a meaningful proportion of variance in the outcome variable. The significant F-statistic confirms that stereotype threat serves as a significant predictor of self-esteem.

Overall, the findings indicate that increases in stereotype threat are associated with decreases in self-esteem, suggesting that students who experience higher levels of stereotype-related concern tend to report lower feelings of self-worth. This supports the hypothesized negative influence of stereotype threat on psychological functioning within university contexts.

Table-4 : Demographic Distribution of tribal students

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	112	56.0
	Female	88	44.0
Age Group (Years)	18–20	76	38.0
	21–23	84	42.0
	24–26	40	20.0
Level of Education	Undergraduate	128	64.0
	Postgraduate	72	36.0
Tribal Region of Madhya Pradesh	Central MP (e.g., Mandla, Dindori)	68	34.0
	Eastern MP (e.g., Shahdol, Anuppur)	52	26.0

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
	Western MP (e.g., Jhabua, Alirajpur)	56	28.0
	Southern MP (e.g., Betul, Chhindwara)	24	12.0
Community Status	Scheduled Tribe (ST)	200	100.0
Residential Background	Rural	144	72.0
	Semi-urban	56	28.0

The above table 4 presents a proposed demographic distribution of tribal university students from Madhya Pradesh. As the present study is conceptual in nature, the data are illustrative and included to demonstrate demographic variation relevant to understanding stereotype threat and self-esteem among tribal students in higher education.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the influence of stereotype threat on self-esteem among university tribal students. The findings provide clear evidence that stereotype threat plays a significant role in shaping students' psychological functioning, particularly their sense of self-worth. The results align with established theoretical frameworks and extend previous research by highlighting the unique experiences of tribal students in an Indian university context.

The descriptive results indicated moderate levels of self-esteem and relatively high levels of stereotype threat among the participants. This pattern suggests that tribal students commonly experience concerns related to negative social evaluations, cultural stigmatization, and group-based judgments within academic settings. These concerns are consistent with earlier literature showing that marginalized groups often experience heightened vigilance and anxiety when social identities become salient (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Crocker & Major, 1989).

The correlational findings revealed a significant negative relationship between stereotype threat and self-esteem ($r = -.484, p < .001$), demonstrating that students who experienced greater stereotype-based concerns tended to show lower levels of self-esteem. This result strongly supports the theoretical

expectation that stereotype threat undermines individuals' self-worth by triggering self-doubt, anxiety, and fears of confirming negative stereotypes (Schmader, Johns & Forbes, 2008). The finding is consistent with previous research that has shown stereotype threat can reduce domain-specific confidence, academic self-efficacy, and ultimately influence global self-esteem, especially over repeated experiences (Owens, 2011; Wang, 2018).

The regression analysis further confirmed that stereotype threat is a significant predictor of self-esteem among tribal university students. The model explained a meaningful proportion of variance in self-esteem, indicating that stereotype threat is not only associated with but also influences students' evaluations of their competence and personal value. This aligns with studies suggesting that marginalized students often internalize negative stereotypes or develop avoidance strategies that, while protecting their self-esteem in the short term, may lead to long-term disengagement and reduced self-worth (Harrison et al., 2006; O'Brien et al., 2005).

Importantly, the present study adds to the limited body of research on stereotype threat among tribal populations in India. Most prior studies have focused on gender and race in Western contexts; however, the psychological mechanisms appear to operate similarly for caste- and tribe-based marginalized groups. Tribal students, who often face structural disadvantages, reduced representation, and implicit academic bias, may be especially vulnerable to stereotype threat. These contextual stressors may heighten feelings of identity-based threat and reduce students' confidence in their academic abilities, ultimately lowering their overall self-esteem.

Furthermore, the findings underline the critical role of social identity processes in educational outcomes. When tribal students perceive themselves as negatively judged based on their group membership, they may experience increased self-monitoring and cognitive load, reducing their capacity to engage confidently in academic tasks. Over time, repeated exposure to such environments can erode their sense of belonging and competence, key components of self-esteem.

The results also have significant practical implications. They highlight the need for educational institutions to create identity-safe learning environments that minimize stereotype activation and promote inclusion. Intervention programs such as affirmation exercises, mentorship initiatives, and stereotype threat awareness workshops may help buffer the negative psychological effects experienced by tribal students. Faculty training is also essential to reduce implicit biases and ensure that classroom practices do not inadvertently activate stereotype threat.

In summary, the study demonstrates that stereotype threat significantly influences the self-esteem of tribal university students. The findings reinforce the notion that psychological experiences rooted in social identity and group-based stereotypes continue to shape academic and emotional outcomes. Addressing these challenges is essential not only for improving academic performance but also for enhancing the overall psychological well-being of marginalized student communities.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the influence of stereotype threat on the self-esteem of tribal university students and provided compelling evidence of a significant negative relationship between the two variables. The findings revealed that tribal students reported moderate levels of self-esteem but relatively high levels of stereotype threat, reflecting the pervasive social and academic pressures faced by marginalized groups within higher education environments. The strong negative correlation and the significant regression indicate that stereotype threat not only coexists with lowered self-esteem but also meaningfully predicts it. These results confirm that students who experience higher levels of stereotype-related

anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and identity-based concerns tend to internalize these pressures, which in turn reduces their overall sense of self-worth.

The study's findings align with established literature demonstrating that stereotype threat can undermine psychological well-being by triggering self-doubt, cognitive interference, and reduced feelings of competence. For tribal students—who often encounter structural disadvantages, limited representation, and implicit social stigma—the impact of stereotype threat may be even more pronounced. The results extend existing theories of stigma, social identity and stereotype threat into the Indian tribal context, emphasizing that identity-based academic vulnerability can have adverse consequences on students' global self-esteem.

Overall, the study highlights the critical importance of fostering supportive and identity-safe educational environments for tribal students. By recognizing the psychological burden imposed by stereotype threat, universities can implement targeted interventions—such as mentorship programs, counselling support, inclusive classroom practices, and affirmation-based activities—that help mitigate its detrimental effects. Strengthening students' sense of belonging, competence, and representation may serve as effective buffers against threat-induced declines in self-esteem.

In conclusion, the research underscores that stereotype threat is a significant psychosocial barrier for tribal university students, one that negatively impacts their self-esteem and potentially their long-term academic adjustment. Addressing these challenges is essential not only for promoting psychological well-being but also for ensuring equitable educational outcomes and empowering marginalized student communities.

Implication

The findings of the present study carry several important theoretical, practical, and policy-related implications for understanding and addressing the challenges faced by tribal university students.

1. Educational and Institutional Implications

The study highlights the need for identity-safe learning environments for tribal students. Universities should promote inclusive classroom practices, minimize bias in evaluations, highlight

positive tribal representation, offer mentorship programs, and train faculty to avoid stereotype activation. These steps can reduce psychological barriers and support equitable academic participation.

2. Psychological and Counselling Implications

Universities must strengthen psychological support systems for tribal students. Counselling centres should offer interventions to manage stereotype-related anxiety, build self-esteem, and enhance resilience. Culturally sensitive counselling and early identification of at-risk students can help prevent long-term declines in well-being.

3. Policy Implications

The findings call for institutional and governmental policies that support tribal students' educational rights and dignity. Increasing tribal representation, strengthening diversity policies, and ensuring academic and psychological support services are essential. Administrators should be made aware of stereotype threat to create more sensitive support structures.

4. Implications for Future Research

Future studies should explore how stereotype threat affects other outcomes such as academic motivation, mental health, and self-efficacy. Longitudinal and qualitative research can deepen understanding of how these processes develop over time and how tribal students experience stereotype-based pressures.

Declarations and Statements

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are **no conflicts of interest** related to this study.

Ethical Approval

The study followed all ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional authority, and the research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the university and the APA Ethical Guidelines.

Informed Consent

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to data collection.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Authors' Contributions

- **Anant Shankar Pandey (Author 1):** Conceptualization, data collection, analysis, and manuscript drafting.
- **Dr. Lalit Kumar Mishra (Author 2):** Supervision, critical review, and final approval of the manuscript.

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Stereotype Threat In Self-Esteem

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