

# Examining the Association of Acculturative Stress and Perceived Discrimination with Psychological Well-Being among Tribal Adolescents

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## Abstract

Acculturative stress is the psychological stress experienced by individuals when adjusting to a new cultural environment that is different from their original culture, and it is commonly experienced by tribal adolescents who are exposed to mainstream culture through formal education and social interaction. Perceived discrimination refers to an individual's perception of being treated unfairly or negatively because of their cultural background, ethnicity, language, or social identity, and it acts as a chronic social stressor that can negatively affect mental health and overall functioning. Psychological well-being reflects how individuals think about themselves, manage their emotions, build relationships, and deal with life challenges, and it is particularly important during adolescence, which is a critical period of identity formation and emotional development. The present study aimed to examine the impact of acculturative stress and perceived discrimination on the psychological well-being of tribal adolescents and to find out the influence of demographic variables such as age, gender, class studying, birth order, and family income status on the study variables. The study was conducted among 100 tribal adolescents aged 13–19 years, selected using a purposive sampling method from tribal hostels, schools, and colleges in Attappadi, Kerala. Data were collected using the Acculturative Stress Scale developed by Remya and Bindu (2013), the Everyday Discrimination Scale developed by Williams et al. (1997), and the Psychological Well-Being Scale developed by Ryff (1989). The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between acculturative stress and perceived discrimination, and a significant negative relationship between acculturative stress and psychological well-being, while perceived discrimination and psychological well-being did not show a significant relationship. Among the demographic variables, family income status was found to significantly influence acculturative stress and perceived discrimination, while age, gender, class studying, and birth order did not show significant differences in any of the study variables.

**Keywords:** acculturative stress, perceived discrimination, psychological well-being, tribal adolescents, income class

## 1. Introduction

Adolescence is a significant developmental stage characterized by rapid physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes (Steinberg, 2014). During this period, individuals undergo identity formation, emotional development, and social role adjustment, all of which play a crucial role in shaping their psychological well-being (Erikson, 1968). The experiences encountered during adolescence have long-term effects on personality development, mental health, social relationships, and future life adjustment. While adolescence itself is a challenging developmental period, the situation becomes more complex for adolescents belonging to tribal communities, as they often experience additional social, cultural, and environmental challenges compared to adolescents from mainstream communities (Berry, 1997).

Tribal communities are culturally distinct groups with their own traditions, customs, values, language, and social practices. However, due to modernization, urbanization, formal education, and increased interaction with the dominant culture, tribal populations are gradually exposed to new cultural environments that are often very different from their traditional way of life (Berry, 1997). As a result, tribal adolescents frequently find themselves in situations where they must adjust to a new cultural environment while simultaneously trying to maintain their original cultural identity. This process of adapting to a new culture is known as acculturation, and while it can provide opportunities for education, employment, and social mobility, it can also create significant psychological stress (Berry, 1997).

The stress experienced during the process of cultural adjustment is known as acculturative stress (Berry, 1997). Tribal adolescents may experience acculturative stress due to language barriers, differences in cultural norms and values, identity confusion, academic pressure, and difficulties in social adjustment. They may feel that they do not fully belong to either their traditional culture or the dominant culture, which can create feelings of confusion, insecurity, and emotional distress. Over time, this stress can negatively affect their mental health and psychological well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

In addition to acculturative stress, tribal adolescents may also experience discrimination and social exclusion when they interact with members of the dominant culture. They may be treated unfairly or differently because of their cultural background, ethnicity, language, physical appearance, or socioeconomic status. These experiences are referred to as perceived discrimination (Meyer, 2003). When adolescents perceive that they are being treated unfairly or negatively, it can lead to feelings of inferiority, low self-esteem, anger, sadness, and social withdrawal (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Repeated experiences of discrimination can have a serious impact on their psychological well-being and overall development (Meyer, 2003).

Therefore, tribal adolescents represent a vulnerable population group that may experience both acculturative stress and perceived discrimination, which can significantly influence their psychological well-being. Understanding the psychological experiences of tribal adolescents is important for developing interventions and support systems that can help improve their mental health and overall well-being.

### 1.1 Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being refers to an individual's overall emotional, psychological, and social functioning. It includes factors such as self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, personal growth, and positive relationships with others (Ryff, 1989). Psychological well-being is not merely the absence of mental illness, but it refers to the presence of positive psychological functioning and life satisfaction (Ryff, 1989).

Psychological well-being is particularly important during adolescence because this stage involves identity formation, emotional regulation, social relationship development, and academic adjustment (Erikson,

1968; Steinberg, 2014). Adolescents with good psychological well-being are more likely to have positive self-esteem, better emotional control, healthy social relationships, and good academic performance. They are also more capable of coping with stress and adapting to new environments (Steinberg, 2014).

Ryff's Model of Psychological Well-Being (1989) explains psychological well-being as a multidimensional concept that includes six major components: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. According to this model, psychological well-being is not just happiness or absence of mental illness, but it is the ability of an individual to function positively in different areas of life.

The Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) explains that psychological well-being depends on how individuals cope with stressful situations. According to this theory, stress occurs when individuals perceive that the demands of a situation are greater than their ability to cope with it. When individuals are unable to cope effectively with stress, it can lead to psychological distress and reduced psychological well-being.

### **1.2 Acculturative Stress**

Acculturative stress refers to the psychological stress experienced by individuals when they are adjusting to a new culture that is different from their original culture (Berry, 1997). This stress occurs as a result of difficulties in adapting to new cultural values, language, social norms, and lifestyle. Acculturative stress is commonly experienced by individuals who move from one cultural environment to another, such as migrants, minority groups, and tribal populations who are exposed to mainstream culture through education and social interaction (Berry, 1997).

Acculturation Theory proposed by Berry (1997) explains how individuals adjust to a new culture and how this adjustment process can create stress. According to Berry, when individuals come into contact with a new culture, they adopt one of four acculturation strategies: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. Integration is considered the healthiest form of acculturation because individuals are able to maintain their cultural identity while also adjusting to the new culture. Marginalization is considered the most stressful condition because individuals feel that they do not belong to either culture.

Cultural Conflict Theory explains that acculturative stress occurs when there is a conflict between the values, beliefs, and practices of two different cultures (Berry, 1997). When adolescents are unable to balance these two cultures, they may experience identity confusion, stress, and emotional problems. They may feel pressure to change their behavior in order to fit into the dominant culture while also trying to maintain their traditional culture.

### **1.3 Perceived Discrimination**

Perceived discrimination refers to an individual's perception that they are being treated unfairly or negatively because of their cultural background, ethnicity, language, religion, or social identity (Meyer, 2003). Perceived discrimination does not only include direct discrimination but also includes indirect forms such as social exclusion, stereotyping, teasing, and negative attitudes from others.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) explains that individuals derive their identity and self-esteem from the social groups to which they belong. When individuals feel that their social group is discriminated against or treated unfairly, it can negatively affect their self-esteem and identity. This can lead to feelings of inferiority, low self-confidence, and identity conflict.

Stigma Theory (Goffman, 1963) explains that individuals who belong to socially stigmatized groups often experience discrimination, rejection, and social exclusion. Tribal adolescents may experience stigma because of their cultural background, language, dress, or physical appearance. These experiences can

create feelings of shame, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal, which can negatively affect their psychological well-being.

#### 1.4 Need and Significance of the Study

The present study is needed because tribal adolescents experience significant psychological challenges during a critical stage of their development. As they transition from their traditional cultural environment to mainstream residential schools, they face language barriers, cultural differences, identity conflict, social adjustment difficulties, and experiences of discrimination. Moreover, most existing research on acculturative stress and perceived discrimination has been conducted in Western contexts and cannot be generalized to the distinct cultural and socioeconomic realities of tribal communities in India (Berry, 1997; Mohanty, 2006). Therefore, it is important to examine how acculturative stress and perceived discrimination are associated with the psychological well-being of tribal adolescents within the Indian context.

This study is significant because it focuses on understanding the psychological experiences of a vulnerable and underrepresented population. By examining the associations among acculturative stress, perceived discrimination, and psychological well-being, the study provides useful insights for teachers, school counsellors, mental health professionals, and policymakers to design culturally sensitive support programs, counselling services, and inclusive educational practices.

## 2. Review of Literature

**Kwan et al. (2023)** examined the indirect relationships between perceived discrimination, acculturative stress, and suicide risk among ethnic minority college students (N = 167). The findings revealed that both perceived discrimination and acculturative stress were indirectly associated with increased suicide risk through heightened perceptions of perceived burdensomeness, highlighting perceived burdensomeness as a key psychological mechanism linking sociocultural stressors to suicide risk.

**Gomez et al. (2023)** examined the relationship between acculturative stress, perceived discrimination, and vulnerability to suicide attempts among 969 emerging adults from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds. The findings revealed that familial acculturative stress significantly increased the odds of reporting a past suicide attempt, particularly among Asian, Black, and non-U.S.-born White participants. Additionally, perceived discrimination emerged as a strong predictor of suicide attempts across groups.

**Bae (2020)** examined the longitudinal relationships among bicultural identity, acculturative stress, and psychological well-being among 1,635 multicultural adolescents. The findings revealed that bicultural identity had a direct positive effect on psychological well-being and a direct negative effect on acculturative stress. Furthermore, acculturative stress negatively influenced psychological well-being.

**Urzua et al. (2018)** investigated the mediating effect of self-esteem on the association between perceived discrimination and psychological well-being among 853 South American immigrants in Chile. Structural equation modeling indicated that perceived discrimination negatively influenced psychological well-being both directly and indirectly through self-esteem, demonstrating self-esteem's protective role in buffering the negative effects of perceived discrimination.

**Remya (2017)** examined the relationship between acculturative stress, interpersonal relationships, and adjustment problems among 625 tribal girl students in Kerala. The findings revealed a significant negative relationship between acculturative stress and both interpersonal relationships and adjustment, indicating that higher levels of acculturative stress were associated with poorer interpersonal relationships and greater adjustment difficulties.

**Tummala-Narra et al. (2016)** explored acculturative stress and coping among 16 South Asian adolescents using a qualitative design. The results indicated that acculturative stress experienced in family and school contexts negatively influenced psychological well-being and bicultural identity development, whereas supportive family relationships and cultural pride contributed to resilience and adaptive coping.

**Weiss, Westerhof, and Bohlmeijer (2016)** conducted a meta-analysis of 27 randomized controlled trials (N = 3,579 participants) examining whether psychological well-being can be improved through behavioral interventions. The findings revealed a moderate overall effect of behavioral interventions on psychological well-being (Cohen's  $d = 0.44$ ), with interventions being more effective when delivered individually and among clinical populations.

**Ayooob et al. (2015)** examined the role of cultural intelligence in predicting acculturative stress and psychological well-being among 219 Kashmiri migrant college students in Bhopal. The findings revealed that higher levels of cultural intelligence significantly predicted lower acculturative stress and higher psychological well-being, emphasizing cultural intelligence as an important personal resource that facilitates adaptation.

**Kim, Hogge, and Salvisberg (2014)** examined the mediating and moderating roles of self-esteem and ethnic identity in the association between acculturative stress and psychological well-being among 171 first-generation Mexican immigrants. The findings revealed that higher levels of acculturative stress were associated with lower self-esteem, which subsequently led to reduced psychological well-being.

**Schmitt et al. (2014)** conducted a meta-analytic review including 328 independent effect sizes (N = 144,246 participants) and revealed a significant negative association between perceived discrimination and psychological well-being ( $r = -.23$ ), with stronger effects observed among disadvantaged groups, children, and in cases of personal discrimination compared to group-level discrimination.

**Sirin et al. (2013)** examined the impact of acculturative stress on internalizing mental health symptoms among 332 immigrant adolescents over a two-year period. Although there was an overall decline in internalizing symptoms during high school, higher levels of acculturative stress significantly predicted increases in withdrawn behavior, somatic complaints, and anxiety/depression.

**Park and Lee (2012)** examined the mediating effect of hope on the relationship between acculturative stress and psychological well-being among 609 women immigrants in Korea. The findings indicated that acculturative stress was negatively correlated with both hope and psychological well-being, and hope significantly mediated the relationship between acculturative stress and positive well-being.

**Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. (2006)** examined the relationship between perceived discrimination, social support networks, and psychological well-being among 2,360 immigrants in Finland. The findings revealed that perceived discrimination had a significant negative impact on psychological well-being, while host-country social support networks demonstrated strong direct and buffering effects.

**Jang, Chiriboga, and Small (2008)** examined the relationship between perceived discrimination and psychological well-being among 1,554 adults aged 45–74 years. The findings demonstrated that sense of control partially mediated the relationship between perceived discrimination and both positive and negative affect.

## 2.1 Research Gap

Most existing studies on acculturative stress and psychological well-being have focused on immigrants or non-tribal populations, particularly in Western countries. Very few studies have examined these issues among tribal adolescents in Kerala, who experience unique cultural, educational, and social challenges while adjusting to mainstream society. Additionally, previous research has rarely examined the combined

influence of acculturative stress and perceived discrimination on psychological well-being. Therefore, the present study focuses on tribal adolescents in Kerala to understand the combined impact of acculturative stress and perceived discrimination on psychological well-being and to contribute to the development of culturally relevant mental health interventions.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Aim

To examine the association of acculturative stress and perceived discrimination with psychological well-being among tribal adolescents.

#### 3.2 Objectives

1. To assess the association of acculturative stress and perceived discrimination with psychological well-being among tribal adolescents.
2. To find out the influence of demographic factors such as age, gender, class studying, birth order, and family income status on the psychological well-being among tribal adolescents.

#### 3.3 Variables

**Independent Variables:** Acculturative Stress, Perceived Discrimination

**Dependent Variable:** Psychological Well-being

#### 3.4 Hypotheses

1. H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant difference in acculturative stress, perceived discrimination, and psychological well-being based on age among tribal adolescents.
2. H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant difference in acculturative stress, perceived discrimination, and psychological well-being based on gender among tribal adolescents.
3. H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant difference in acculturative stress, perceived discrimination, and psychological well-being based on class studying among tribal adolescents.
4. H<sub>04</sub>: There is no significant difference in acculturative stress, perceived discrimination, and psychological well-being based on birth order among tribal adolescents.
5. H<sub>05</sub>: There is no significant difference in acculturative stress, perceived discrimination, and psychological well-being based on family income status among tribal adolescents.
6. H<sub>06</sub>: There is no significant relationship between acculturative stress and psychological well-being among tribal adolescents.
7. H<sub>07</sub>: There is no significant relationship between perceived discrimination and psychological well-being among tribal adolescents.
8. H<sub>08</sub>: There is no significant relationship between acculturative stress and perceived discrimination among tribal adolescents.

#### 3.5 Research Design and Sampling

The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional descriptive research design. The sample consisted of approximately 100 tribal adolescents studying in schools and colleges, within the age group of 13–19 years, selected using purposive sampling from tribal hostels, schools, and colleges in Attappadi, Kerala. Non-tribal adolescents and those outside the age range of 13–19 years were excluded.

#### 3.6 Tools

**Acculturative Stress Scale (Remya & Bindu, 2013):** A 30-item self-report scale developed for tribal students, measuring stress aspects such as language difficulties, cultural differences, social adjustment problems, identity conflict, and feelings of exclusion. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert format (Strongly

Agree to Strongly Disagree). Higher scores indicate higher acculturative stress. The scale reports high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha = 0.850.

**Everyday Discrimination Scale (Williams et al., 1997):** A 9-item scale measuring perceived discrimination in daily life, including routine and chronic experiences of unfair treatment. Responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (Never to Very Often). The scale reports high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha = 0.88.

**Psychological Well-Being Scale — 18-item version (Ryff, 1989):** An 18-item scale assessing six dimensions of positive functioning: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Participants respond using a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree). Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.70 to 0.85.

### 3.7 Procedure

The investigator obtained permission from the Sub Collector and ITDP (Integrated Tribal Development Project), Attappadi, before conducting the study. Necessary approvals were also taken from the concerned school and college authorities. Participants were approached directly, and the purpose of the study was explained clearly. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and participants were informed that their responses would be used only for research purposes. After completion, the questionnaires were collected immediately and scored according to the respective scoring procedures of the scales.

### 3.8 Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviation, and percentage analysis were used to describe sample characteristics. Inferential statistics included independent samples t-test (gender differences), one-way ANOVA (age, class, birth order, and family income differences), Pearson Correlation Analysis (relationships between variables), and Multiple Regression Analysis (predictive role of independent variables on psychological well-being). All analyses were carried out using SPSS Version 23.0.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the tribal adolescent respondents.

Demographic Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Age	13–15	37	36.3%
	16–19	63	61.8%
Gender	Male	47	46.1%
	Female	53	52.0%
Education	9th Standard	11	10.8%
	10th Standard	20	19.6%
	11th Standard	20	19.6%
	12th Standard	39	38.2%
	UG 1st Year	10	9.8%

Birth Order	First Born	34	33.3%
	Second Born	25	24.5%
	Third Born	11	10.8%
	Last Born	21	20.6%
	Single Child	9	8.8%
Income	Upper Class	14	13.7%
	Middle Class	47	46.1%
	Lower Class	39	38.2%

**Table 1:** Demographic Characteristics of Tribal Adolescent Participants (N = 100)

Most of the participants were aged between 16 and 19 years (61.8%), while 36.3% belonged to the age group of 13–15 years. Females (52.0%) were slightly more than males (46.1%). In terms of education, most participants were studying in 12th standard (38.2%). Regarding birth order, most participants were first-born (33.3%). In terms of family income, most participants belonged to the middle-class group (46.1%), followed by lower class (38.2%) and upper class (13.7%).

#### 4.2 Age Differences in Study Variables

**Table 2 presents the results of an independent samples t-test examining differences between age groups 13–15 and 16–19.**

Variables	13–15 (N=37) M	SD	16–19 (N=63) M	SD	t	df	p
PD	26.38	5.732	25.65	5.979	.596	98	.941
PWB	70.27	5.414	71.10	4.500	-.820	98	.141
AS	91.51	14.738	90.30	13.061	.427	98	.243

**Table 2:** Difference in Age on Acculturative Stress, Perceived Discrimination, and Psychological Well-Being (PD = Perceived Discrimination, PWB = Psychological Well-Being, AS = Acculturative Stress)

The results showed no significant difference in PD ( $t(98) = .596, p > .05$ ), PWB ( $t(98) = -.820, p > .05$ ), and AS ( $t(98) = .427, p > .05$ ) between the two age groups. Therefore,  $H_0$  is accepted, indicating that there are no significant differences in acculturative stress, perceived discrimination, and psychological well-being based on age among tribal adolescents.

#### 4.3 Gender Differences in Study Variables

**Table 3 presents the results of an independent samples t-test examining gender differences.**

Variables	Male (N=47) M	SD	Female (N=53) M	SD	t	df	p
PD	25.30	6.630	26.47	5.105	-.998	98	.062
PWB	70.98	5.080	70.62	4.675	.365	98	.415

AS	88.28	13.854	92.94	92.94	-1.724	98	.624
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**Table 3:** Difference in Gender on Acculturative Stress, Perceived Discrimination, and Psychological Well-Being

The results showed no significant difference in PD ( $t(98) = -.998, p > .05$ ), PWB ( $t(98) = .365, p > .05$ ), and AS ( $t(98) = -1.724, p > .05$ ) between males and females. Therefore,  $H_02$  is accepted, indicating no significant gender differences in the study variables.

#### 4.4 Education Level Differences in Study Variables

Table 4 presents the one-way ANOVA results for education level differences.

Var.	9th M	SD	10th M	SD	11th M	SD	12th M	SD	UG M	SD	F	p
PD	23.64	5.005	26.70	4.953	24.60	6.715	26.69	6.258	26.50	4.927	.948	.440
PWB	71.27	6.278	69.20	5.033	71.15	4.475	71.44	4.599	70.20	4.614	.796	.531
AS	83.27	14.192	90.85	12.584	87.90	15.362	93.74	12.957	92.80	12.957	1.609	.178

**Table 4:** Difference in Education Level on Acculturative Stress, Perceived Discrimination, and Psychological Well-Being

The results showed no significant difference in PD ( $F = .948, p > .05$ ), PWB ( $F = .796, p > .05$ ), and AS ( $F = 1.609, p > .05$ ) across the different education levels. Therefore,  $H_03$  is accepted.

#### 4.5 Birth Order Differences in Study Variables

Table 5 presents the one-way ANOVA results for birth order differences.

Var.	First M	SD	Second M	SD	Third M	SD	Last M	SD	Single M	SD	F	p
PD	24.82	5.931	27.96	6.215	23.55	5.410	27.00	5.550	24.78	4.631	1.823	.131
PWB	69.97	4.441	69.88	5.593	72.45	5.241	71.71	3.621	72.22	5.890	1.183	.323
AS	88.24	15.374	97.20	9.469	87.82	12.640	89.90	14.265	87.89	13.100	2.010	.099

**Table 5:** Difference in Birth Order on Acculturative Stress, Perceived Discrimination, and Psychological Well-Being

The results showed no significant difference in PD ( $F = 1.823, p > .05$ ), PWB ( $F = 1.183, p > .05$ ), and AS ( $F = 2.010, p > .05$ ) across birth order categories. Therefore,  $H_04$  is accepted.

#### 4.6 Income Class Differences in Study Variables

Table 6 presents the one-way ANOVA results for income class differences.

Variables	Upper Class (N=14) M	SD	Middle Class (N=47) M	SD	Lower Class (N=39) M	SD	F	p
PD	15.21	3.577	25.60	3.487	30.15	3.150	101.534*	.000

PWB	72.93	3.832	70.47	4.907	70.41	5.009	1.605	.206
AS	70.50	6.619	85.87	7.566	103.90	6.545	136.558*	.000

**Table 6:** Difference in Income Class on Acculturative Stress, Perceived Discrimination, and Psychological Well-Being (\*  $p < .05$ )

A significant difference was found in PD ( $F = 101.534, p < .05$ ) and AS ( $F = 136.558, p < .05$ ) across income class categories. Therefore,  $H_05$  is rejected for PD and AS. Lower-class tribal adolescents scored the highest on both perceived discrimination ( $M = 30.15$ ) and acculturative stress ( $M = 103.90$ ), while upper-class participants scored the lowest. No significant difference was found in PWB ( $F = 1.605, p > .05$ ), and  $H_05$  is accepted for psychological well-being.

#### 4.7 Correlation between Acculturative Stress, Perceived Discrimination, and Psychological Well-Being

Table 7 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients among the three study variables.

Variables	M	SD	1. PD	2. PWB	3. AS
1. PD	70.79	4.848	1	-.201*	.775**
2. PWB	25.92	5.870	-.201*	1	-.122
3. AS	90.75	13.644	.775**	-.122	1

**Table 7:** Pearson Correlation Coefficients among Study Variables (\*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; PD = Perceived Discrimination, PWB = Psychological Well-Being, AS = Acculturative Stress)

A significant positive relationship was found between PD and AS ( $r = .775, p < .01$ ), indicating that as perceived discrimination increases, acculturative stress also increases.  $H_08$  is therefore rejected. A significant negative relationship was found between PD and PWB ( $r = -.201, p < .05$ ), indicating that as perceived discrimination increases, psychological well-being decreases.  $H_07$  is therefore rejected. No significant relationship was found between AS and PWB ( $r = -.122, p > .05$ ), and  $H_06$  is accepted.

### 5. Discussion

The present study examined the association of acculturative stress and perceived discrimination with psychological well-being among tribal adolescents attending residential schools in Kerala. The findings revealed a significant strong positive association between acculturative stress and perceived discrimination ( $r = .775, p < .01$ ), a significant negative association between perceived discrimination and psychological well-being ( $r = -.201, p < .05$ ), and a non-significant negative association between acculturative stress and psychological well-being ( $r = -.122, p > .05$ ).

The most prominent finding was the strong positive association between acculturative stress and perceived discrimination. This result is consistent with Berry (1997), who proposed that individuals belonging to minority cultural groups who encounter difficulties in navigating cultural transitions are more likely to perceive themselves as targets of discrimination. This finding also aligns with the meta-analytic work of Pascoe and Smart Richman (2009), who established that perceived discrimination consistently emerges as one of the strongest correlates of acculturative stress among minority adolescents.

Several factors specific to the tribal adolescent context explain why acculturative stress and perceived discrimination are so strongly correlated. Linguistic differences between native tribal languages and the dominant language of instruction create persistent communication barriers that expose tribal students to

ridicule and social exclusion, simultaneously elevating both variables (Mohanty, 2006). The visible cultural distinctiveness of tribal adolescents through attire, food preferences, and social customs renders them identifiable as cultural outsiders, increasing vulnerability to stereotyping (Williams & Mohammed, 2009). Furthermore, the residential school setting, by physically separating tribal adolescents from their families and cultural support systems, intensifies feelings of cultural dislocation (Mishra, 2016).

The significant negative association between perceived discrimination and psychological well-being is consistent with the meta-analytic review of Yoon, Langrehr, and Ong (2011), which reported that perceived discrimination is consistently and negatively associated with psychological well-being among minority adolescents. Discrimination experiences directly undermine the satisfaction of fundamental psychological needs for belonging, competence, and autonomy as articulated by Ryan and Deci (2000), thereby disrupting the psychological foundations of well-being. However, the magnitude of this association was relatively modest ( $r = -.201$ ), suggesting that other variables such as social support, coping strategies, and cultural identity strength may play important moderating roles (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Phinney, 1990).

The non-significant association between acculturative stress and psychological well-being may be interpreted through several lenses. Tribal adolescents in residential schools may have developed robust cultural coping mechanisms and collective resilience strategies rooted in their indigenous identity that effectively buffer the negative psychological effects of acculturative stress. Ungar (2008) proposed that communities with strong cultural identities are capable of fostering resilience in the face of acculturative pressures. An alternative explanation is that acculturative stress may exert its influence on psychological well-being indirectly through perceived discrimination as a mediating variable, consistent with the stress process model proposed by Pearlin et al. (1981).

Income class emerged as a highly significant factor, with lower-class tribal adolescents experiencing substantially higher levels of both acculturative stress and perceived discrimination. This finding underscores the compounding vulnerabilities created by the intersection of economic disadvantage and cultural marginalization, extensively documented by Williams and Mohammed (2009). Krieger (1999) further demonstrated that socioeconomic disadvantage heightens vulnerability to discrimination, as lower-class individuals are more frequently exposed to prejudicial treatment in educational and social settings.

## 6. Conclusion

The present study examined the association of acculturative stress and perceived discrimination with psychological well-being among tribal adolescents attending residential schools in Kerala. The findings revealed a significant strong positive association between acculturative stress and perceived discrimination, indicating that as cultural stress increases, the experience of discrimination also intensifies among tribal adolescents. A significant negative association was found between perceived discrimination and psychological well-being, suggesting that greater discrimination experience is linked to reduced well-being. However, no significant direct association was observed between acculturative stress and psychological well-being, implying that acculturative stress may influence well-being indirectly through perceived discrimination rather than through a direct pathway. Among demographic variables, income class emerged as a highly significant factor, with lower-class tribal adolescents experiencing the greatest levels of acculturative stress and perceived discrimination. These findings highlight the importance of addressing both cultural and socioeconomic inequalities to promote the psychological well-being of tribal adolescents within mainstream educational settings.

## 6.1 Limitations

The present study has several limitations. First, reliance on self-report measures introduces the possibility of response biases including social desirability bias. Second, the cross-sectional design restricts the ability to draw causal conclusions regarding directionality of observed associations. Third, the sample size of 100 tribal adolescents drawn from a specific geographic region limits generalizability to other tribal communities across India. Fourth, potentially important variables such as social support, coping strategies, and cultural identity strength were not examined. Fifth, the study did not account for within-group diversity among tribal communities.

## 6.2 Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should employ longitudinal research designs to examine temporal ordering and causal pathways among the three variables. Mediation and moderation analyses should be incorporated to examine whether perceived discrimination mediates the relationship between acculturative stress and psychological well-being. Future research should expand the sample size and diversity by including tribal adolescents from multiple states and varied educational settings across India. Integration of qualitative methodologies would complement quantitative approaches by capturing the lived dimensions of tribal adolescents' experiences. Finally, future research should evaluate the efficacy of culturally sensitive interventions including cultural identity affirmation programs, indigenous language support initiatives, peer support groups, and anti-discrimination training for educators.

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