

5. Perceived Discrimination In North East India: Epiphanies Versus Ironies

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Abstract:

The present study examined the perceived discrimination experienced by individuals of different age groups across different regions of North-East India. The study explored the differences in the sub-dimensions of perceived discrimination, namely lifetime discrimination and daily discrimination on the grounds of religion and gender. Data was collected from 241 individuals ranging from 20 to 60 years of age hailing from different parts of North-East India (47.3% males and 52.7% females). The Perceived Discrimination scale developed by Williams, YU, Jackson and Anderson (1997) was used in the current study. Results revealed that in the multivariate analysis of test (MANOVA) carried out there was no significant difference between males and females when considered jointly on the two dependent variables. A separate ANOVA was conducted for each dependent variable also revealed that there was no significant difference between males and females, both on lifetime discrimination and daily discrimination. The MANOVA results on the ground of religion revealed that there was a significant difference between Hindus, Muslims and Christians when considered jointly on the two independent variables.

Keywords:

Perceived discrimination • lifetime discrimination • daily discrimination • North -East India

Introduction:

The abstract significance and outcomes of perceived discrimination rely upon the situation of one's gathering in the social structure. Discrimination can be termed as a behaviour, which is unjust and the attitude of which is based biased treatment to an individual, a specific gathering or certain gatherings on the grounds of ethnicity, race, language and sex and so forth. Discrimination is a significant part of shame (Link and Phelan, 2001), and where social imbalances exist, it is a key component of intergroup connections and serves to fortify the

emblematic limits that different social gatherings from one other (Jackman, 1994). Discrimination based on race has received broad research consideration, and there is proceeding with logical enthusiasm for the inescapability and determination of racial segregation for racially criticized groups. Sex, racial, religion, and different types of discrimination are by and large seen as social ills, barring people from circumstances accessible to others dependent on attributes, for example, an individual's sex or skin colour. Discrimination often is not directly observable but shows itself just in a roundabout way, as ex-post disparity across gatherings of the populace. Be that as it may, a similar disparity can likewise emerge if bunches contrast in pertinent monetary qualities or if their individuals settle on deliberately various decisions. Hence, if the presence or absence of discrimination cannot be watched legitimately, the inquiry becomes whether inconsistent results establish proof of inconsistent treatment or not.

2. Discrimination And Its Consequences:

The existence and the experience of discrimination in whichever form it breeds is indeed a complex phenomenon and its existence is multidimensional and is an unavoidable wonder in the lives of numerous racial minorities. It can appear as both explicit and subtle behaviours that saturate the day-by-day lives of people (Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Perceived discrimination, for instance, may not just directly affect mental prosperity, but also have roundabout impacts through a bringing down of sentiments of control. As such, feeling of control may fill in as an interior instrument by which the experience of discrimination shows its psychological consequences. It is important to note here that the experience of discrimination to a great extent will be dependent whether one is a member of a relatively advantaged or disadvantaged group. There have been several studies and researches, which have shown a direct positive correlation between perceived discrimination and lower self-esteem. Numerous survey studies have supported this idea by consistently showing that perceived discrimination is associated with lower self-esteem and less positive self-feelings. But it is interesting to note that there could be certain benefits as well associated with perceiving discrimination as at times it may provide an external attribution or attributing the causes of certain negative personal outcomes or behaviours to external factors rather than owning it for themselves. If we go by the definition of discrimination, it indicates that it is an unjust treatment towards people on the basis of their association with certain groups the membership of which is often beyond their control, which indicates that the cause of this

discrimination revolves more around the perpetrators rather than the victims. In this sense, there is a possibility of individuals being able to safeguard their self-esteem by considering external factors to be responsible for their failures or shortcomings, rather their own personal negligence or mistakes. This gives an idea of the concept of Locus of Control, which indicates how strongly people believe they have control over the situations and experiences that affect their lives. This concept was developed by psychologist Julian Rotter, who devised the Internal-External Locus of Control Scale (I-E) to assess this dimension of personality. Therefore it can be believed in a way that individuals who often have a complaint against others being biased towards them and they being discriminated on several grounds, may probably have a tendency to blame external factors for anything wrong that occurs in their life. But, of course this understanding cannot be generalized. This clearly does not indicate that people desire to be discriminated against, or that there is no real evidence of discriminations in their perceptions of discrimination. However, it asserts that perceptions of discrimination can furnish individuals with self-defensive clarifications that are here and there difficult to discredit. This limiting speculation has been criticized on that attributions to discrimination are rarely completely external, as they include individuals' social personalities, which are inward and frequently focal qualities of them.

3. North-East India And Discrimination:

There are eight states, which comprises the northeastern region of India namely; Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Tripura, Sikkim and Nagaland. There have been several instances reported from time to time which has shown that Northeast India has remained isolated from the main stream Indian culture. It is said that India is a 'Place where there is Unity in Diversity' and it tends to be well found in the North-Eastern area, which comprises of almost about 225 tribes living respectively and advancing their exceptional culture and custom. Yet, when this expression is appropriately investigated, we can discover a feeling of dissimilarity, which frequently the 'alleged standard India' rehearses. It can be said so because of the reports of the prevailing instances of discriminations and prejudices directed towards the people of North East India for varied reasons in varied instances. Some of the common terms used frequently to mock the people of Northeast due to their facial features are 'Chinki', 'Chowmein', 'Chinese', 'Nepali', etc. Such kind of racist behaviour towards the people hailing from a particular specific region may be attributed to reasons such as relatively poor knowledge and limited information and also misinterpretation of

information, which eventually leads to the development of such narrow mentality towards a specific group of people. The recent pandemic has created one notice that the humankind is not absolute however solely a vicinity of the nature. Times like these bring forth truth nature in the majority that ends up in a mass mentality. The folks of the northeast of India are suffering in a silent manner for quite sometimes, which can be credited to the multiple prejudices against them and their culture and practices. Episodes of individuals from the Northeast India being racially criticized in uber urban areas, for example, Delhi, Bengaluru and Kolkata started becoming exposed over the previous month. From being inquired as to whether North-East individuals eat creepy crawlies, live in timberlands, or heft weapons around; to being called ‘Coronavirus’ during the Covid-19 pandemic and tossed out of houses for looking ‘Chinese’, this area has confronted an exceptionally novel sort of discrimination which scarcely includes in broad daylight discusses. As of late notwithstanding, the Covid-19 panic is bringing out undeniably progressively vile sides to the terrain populace of India. Cases go from being called names to being spat on an open street, all in light of the manner in which they look. In the days after the Delhi mosque group was accounted for by the Indian media, a progression of Islamophobic hashtags picked up footing via web-based networking media, Bits of gossip, misinformation and recordings guaranteeing Muslims were intentionally spreading Covid-19 were generally shared, fanning effectively aroused strict pressures in the nation, and North East India was no exemption. Disconnected, Muslims across India with no association with the social occasion in New Delhi state they were focused as India’s reaction to the infection increase. Thus, the present study is part of this perspective and focuses on the evaluation of perceived discrimination of the people of North East India on several grounds, and since moreover the present survey has been carried out during the period of COVID-19 outbreak, a number of situations associated with the lockdown period, have also been highlighted and taken into consideration.

4. The Current Study:

The purpose of this current study was to examine the level of perceived discrimination experienced by individuals of different age groups across different regions of North East India. The sample consisted of individuals hailing from different parts of North East India, namely, Assam, Manipur, Siliguri, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Gangtok. The study aimed to determine the levels of perceived discrimination on two of its subscales, that is, lifetime discrimination and daily discrimination, to identify the patterns of discrimination experienced

by the people of various age groups of North East India on a daily basis as well as their perception of discrimination during their lifetime. The study was undertaken during the COVID-19 global pandemic lockdown period and was particularly conducted in view of the several instances of discrimination and racist remarks towards the people of North East in different parts of India during the COVID-19 global pandemic situation. Also religion and gender has been taken as strong variables in the current study as it has been seen reported in various platforms about instances of domestic violence and also the rising rate of Islamophobia during the period of COVID-19 lockdown. The gathering held by the Tablighi Jamaat of the muslim community in Delhi's Nizamuddin area is believed to release a number of Covid-19 clusters across the country. The Jamaat is said to send out its representatives to different countries for a period of 40 days or lesser and the preachers believe in one-to one contact for the same. An annual event of the Jamaat was held in New Delhi which was attended by Muslims from India and abroad. It is believed that among the attendees of the Jamaat there were a few of them who were carrying the Covid-19 infection that is now being carried and infected several other people in different parts of the country. After this incident hashtags such as #CoronaJihad, #NizamuddinIdiots, began trending, as reported in BBC News (3rd April 2020). As per a report of the News18 INDIA (April 5, 2020) which is an Indian Media television channel owned by Network 18, several truck drivers belonging to the Muslim community were brutally beaten up in Arunachal Pradesh of North East India. As reported in THE FEDERAL (8 April, 2020) which is a digital platform disseminating news, analysis and commentary, it was found that in Assam there were several unofficial notices being made popular in several social media platforms which imposed restrictions on muslims in entering certain areas. Taking into consideration the prevailing circumstances of the global pandemic, there have been a number of cases reported which showcase instances of gender inequality, gender discrimination and domestic violence in different parts of the world. It has been found that due to the social distancing that has prevailed due to the COVID-19 outbreak, there has been a huge detrimental impact on the employment front of women as compared to the male counterparts (Alon, Doepke, Rumsey & Tertilt, 2020). As per a new UN report of the impact of the COVID-19 on women and girls (2020), it has been seen that the current lockdown can result in a higher rate of domestic violence against females as they are spending more and more time with their male partners in a common household. It was reported that incidence of violence against women and girls specifically domestic violence have accelerated during the COVID-19 outbreak as there has been emerging worries due to several insecurities in areas of health and financial sectors accentuated by the confined living

conditions during the quarantine period. As reported in *The Diplomat* (April 17, 2020) which is an international magazine covering current affairs for the Asia-Pacific region, that females who compose almost half of the country's total population, were not present in the COVID-19 policy of the Government, and there had to be a reminder to be given to the Government about certain hygiene necessities of women such as sanitary napkins to be included in the list of essential items during the lockdown period. Therefore in the light of such prevailing circumstances during the global pandemic, the current study has been undertaken to delve deeper into the perceptions of the people of North East India towards discrimination, and whether there is any similarity between the globally reported cases of discrimination on gender and religious grounds with the actual findings of the current survey on the selected sample from individuals of North India.

5. Method:

The Sample consisted of 241 individuals ranging from 20 to 60 years of age hailing from different parts of North East India (47.3% males and 52.7% females).

The respondents were selected on the basis of convenience, their willingness and availability to participate in the survey being undertaken. They belonged to three different religions, that is, Hindu, Muslim and Christianity and were from different occupations such as private or government employees, students, homemakers, unemployed, businesspersons and so on. The study followed all the relevant research ethical guidelines and informed consent was obtained from the participants before they participated in the survey. The inclusion criteria for the present study was male and female participants who belonged originally from North East, but may or may not be currently residing in North East; in order to understand the perceived discrimination they have experienced not only within their place of origin but also their current place of residence or any other place they might have visited or travelled to. The scale that has been used in the current study assesses not only their lifetime perceived discrimination but also the perceived daily discrimination. Age was not considered to be determining criteria for selection of participants.

6. Measures:

The 20-item Perceived Discrimination Scale developed by Williams, Yu, Jackson, & Anderson (1997) was used in the current study to measure the Perceived discrimination of the

participants. This scale has two subscales: The Lifetime Discrimination Scale and the Daily Discrimination Scale. This scale measures the Perceived discrimination varied grounds, such as religion, race, gender, physical appearance, sexual orientation and so on. The Cronbach’s coefficient for the Lifetime Discrimination Scale was found to be = 0.53 and for the Daily Discrimination Scale it was Cronbach’s coefficient = 0.76.

7. Procedure:

Data was collected from the participants by preparing Google forms which was being circulated during the period of COVID-19 lockdown. Informed consent was being obtained from the participants and they were debriefed via email after completing the survey. First of all, the respondents had to respond to a socio demographic questionnaire on completion of which they were being directed to the Perceived Discrimination questionnaire which consisted of 20 items. The questionnaire consisted of two subscales: The Lifetime Discrimination scale which consisted of 11 items which gave a measure of the unfair treatment over the course of their lives. The other subscales were the 9-item Daily Discrimination scale which gave a picture of the participants’ unfair treatment in their day-to-day lives.

8. Results:

Since Gender and religion were the Independent variables in the current study, the data that was collected comprised of 32.4% Hindus, 38.2% Muslims and 29.55 Christians. As mentioned earlier, the sample consisted of 47.3% males and 52.7% females. The Dependent Variables in the current study were Lifetime discrimination and Daily Discrimination.

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to determine the difference between males and females on the two subscales of the Perceived Discrimination Scale. The Perceived Discrimination of the males and females was analyzed for statistical significance using Wilk’s Lambda statistics. The results of the comparison are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: MANOVA-Differences In Perceived Discrimination Of Males And

Variable	Value	F	df	P	Partial η^2
Perceived discrimination	.983	2.01	2	0.136	0.017

In the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) it can be seen that there was no significant difference between males and females when considered jointly on the two Dependent Variables taking Wilk’s $\Lambda = 0.983$, $F(2,238) = 2.10$, $p = 0.136$ and partial $\eta^2 = 0.17$. Thus, we accept the null hypothesis, which indicates that males and females do not differ significantly when considered jointly on the lifetime discrimination and daily discrimination.

To further check the assumption of equal variances, the Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances was carried out and can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Lavene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances of Perceived Discrimination of males and females

Variable	F	df1	df2	Sig.
Lifetime discrimination	0.077	1	239	0.781
Daily discrimination	0.668	1	239	0.414

After carrying out the Lavene’s Test of Equality of error variances it was found that the p value of lifetime discrimination is found to 0.781 and p value of daily discrimination is 0.414, which are both higher than 0.05, therefore it provides some evidence that the Equal variance assumption is satisfied on the univariate level.

A separate ANOVA was conducted for each of the Dependent variables which can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3: ANOVA - Differences Between Lifetime Discrimination And Daily Discrimination Of The Male And Females

Variable	Sum of squares	F	df	P	Partial η^2
Lifetime discrimination	94.183	3.826	1	0.052	.016
Daily discrimination	78.415	0.258	1	0.612	.001

The significant differences in lifetime discrimination and daily discrimination were therefore analyzed separately for males and females by using ANOVA. Results of the ANOVA analysis showed that there was no significant difference between the males and females on the lifetime discrimination where, $F(1,239) = 3.826$, $p = .052$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.016$, where the

Mean of the males is 7.386 and that of females is 6.134. Similarly in the context of Daily discrimination, there was no significant difference between the males and females where, $F(1,239)=0.258$, $p= 0.612$, partial $\eta^2 = .001$, where the Mean of the males is 22.377 and that of females is 23.520.

Religion was the second Dependent variable in the current study, and the respondents of the current study were individuals from three different religions. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to determine the difference between Hindus, Muslims and Christians on the two subscales of the Perceived Discrimination Scale. The Perceived Discrimination of the Hindus, Muslims and Christians was analyzed for statistical significance using Wilk's Lambda statistics. The results of the comparison are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: MANOVA - differences in Perceived Discrimination of males and females

Variable	Value	F	df	P	Partial η^2
Perceived discrimination	.461	56.02	4	.000*	0.321

**Statistically significant difference: $p \leq 0.05$*

In the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), it can be seen that there was no significant difference between Hindus, Muslims and Christians when considered jointly on the two Dependent Variables taking Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.461$, $F(4,474) = 56.02$, $p= 0.000$ and partial $\eta^2 = 0.321$. Thus the null hypothesis is not accepted in this case, which indicates that Hindus, Muslims and Christians differ significantly when considered jointly on the lifetime discrimination and daily discrimination.

To further check the assumption of equal variances, the Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances was carried out and can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5 Lavene's Test of Equality of Error Variances of Perceived Discrimination for Religion

Variable	F	df1	df2	Sig.
Lifetime discrimination	.417	2	238	0.660
Daily discrimination	.713	2	238	0.491

After carrying out the Lavene's Test of Equality of error variances it was found that the p value of lifetime discrimination is found to 0.660 and p value of daily discrimination is 0.491, which are both higher than 0.05, therefore it provides some evidence that the Equal variance assumption is satisfied on the univariate level.

A separate ANOVA was conducted for each of the Dependent variables, which can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6: ANOVA - Differences between Lifetime discrimination and Daily discrimination for Religion

Variable	Sum of squares	F	df	P	Partial η^2
Lifetime discrimination	3211.137	138.112	2	.000*	0.537
Daily discrimination	95.347	0.156	2	0.856	0.001

**Statistically significant difference: $p \leq 0.05$*

The significant differences in lifetime discrimination and daily discrimination were therefore analyzed separately for Hindus, Muslims and Christians by using ANOVA. Results of the ANOVA analysis showed that there was a significant difference between Hindus, Muslims and Christians on lifetime discrimination where, $F(2,238) = 138.112$, $p = 0.000$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.537$, where the Mean of the Hindus is 3.987, Muslims is 11.370 and that of Christians is 3.718. This indicates that in the dimension of Lifetime Discrimination the Muslim participants reported of being discriminated the highest as compared to Hindus and Christians

On the other hand in the sub-scale of Daily discrimination, there was no significant difference between Hindus, Muslims and Christians where, $F(2,238) = 0.156$, $p = 0.856$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.001$, where the Mean of the Hindus is 23.487, Muslims is 23.293 and that of Christians is 22.014.

9. Discussion:

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived discrimination experienced by the individuals of different age groups on the two sub-scales of the Perceived Discrimination Scale, namely, Lifetime discrimination and Daily discrimination. Two variables were taken into considering in assessing the level of perceived discrimination, that is, gender and

religion. In the dimension of gender it was found that there were no significant differences between males and females on both the subscales of Perceived Discrimination, which indicates that both males and females experienced relatively high perceived discrimination, but there were no significant differences in their perception. Therefore both males and females reported almost similar level of discrimination they perceived in their lifetime or on daily basis. Inline with these findings are a few observations and findings reported in a study by Ira Das (2013), where it was reported on the basis of indepth analysis of secondary data collected from the Census reports of the government, National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), Registrar General of India etc. , that the status of women in the various states of North East India are better to a certain extent in a few indicators as compared to the women in other parts of India. As reported by THE NORTH EAST NETWORK (2004), in a report for NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WOMEN NEW DELHI, It has always been believed that females in North East India enjoy relatively greater freedom and mobility as compared to women other parts of the country. This region has been found to be relatively free from certain practices such as dowry and bride burning. This example is often used in many situations to indicate that domestic violence and gender inequality is not very prevalent in North East India ,but the as mentioned in this report and as per the data collected by the North East Network ,violence against women in North East India, more specifically domestic violence is increasing in this part of the country. The findings of the current study is in contrast with the findings of the study by Branscombe (1998) wherein it was reported that the women participants in the study expressed of having experienced several disadvantages such as lack of liberty, discrimination in the work place, fear of sexual abuse. On the other hand in that study the male participants reported of having faced much less severe situations of discrimination such as being the first one or expected to pay the bill for shopping or on dates etc. Taking into consideration the current situation of COVID-19 lockdown, these findings are in contrast with the illustrations of gender discrimination and oppression against women mentioned earlier. As per a study by Kaur and Garg (2008), this could be possible because of economic dependence on their male counterparts many a times. Also sometimes due to the age-old cultural norms and values, women continue to stay in abusive relationships and do not open up about the atrocities they are subjected to. Many a times women consider themselves as responsible even if they have been abused by their partners. Many a time they fear that there will be a shame of being a woman who have been separated or divorced, thereby leading to an unwillingness to express the discrimination they face, eventually leading them to internalize the blame of problems in their life. Lack of education and

information also may play a crucial role herein, where many people are misinformed and consider the oppression as part of the results of their past wrong actions.

In case of the second variable, that is religion, it was found that, there was a significant difference between the perception of Hindus, Muslims and Christians towards in the context of Lifetime Discrimination. It was found that Muslims reported a higher discrimination with a mean of 11.37 as compared to 3.98 and 3.71 among the Hindus and Christians. This indicates that the Muslims have reported to be perceived a much higher lifetime discrimination as compared to the other two religions. This is inline with the findings of the review paper by Rowena Robinso (2016), wherein it has been mentioned that across the world Muslims are subjected to discrimination of all sorts. The data about Indian Muslims in the paper was collated from the Rajinder Sachar Committee Report and also materials collected about discrimination, marginality and human security from various other sources including the 2001 Census reports. Three crucial dimensions of social exclusion faced by the Muslims in India have been found to be marginalization, backwardness and discrimination. In the context of social and physical infrastructure , particularly poor served were found to be the Muslims. In the present study, the sharp distinction in the Perceived Lifetime Discrimination could be attributed to the recent incident that took place in Delhi's Nizamuddin in the month of March 2020 wherein several people across the country were found to be tested positive for COVID-19 post attending the religious congregation at the Tablighi Jamaat's Markaz, as reported in NEWS18 India (April 5, 2020). Post that, incident memes relating to Islamophobia started getting circulated on various platforms. As reported in ThePrint (April 2, 2020), The actions of the Jamaat were indeed irresponsible, but the fact that religious discrimination is being shown to Muslims across the country irrespective of whether they have any connection with the Jamaat or not, is not justified. It was also reported that the stereotypes against the Indian Muslims is not only being showcased by social media but also has caused several incidents of mob lynching against the Muslims in the country. The current study was conducted during the COVID-19 lockdown, just a few days after the Tablighi Jamaat's Markaz incident. Therefore, it might be possible for the Muslims of having reported higher perceived discrimination due to the several news and hashtags related to Islamophobia, which have made them respond in such a manner. Also it cannot be generalized that individuals of other religions had stereotypical attitude towards the Muslims, post the incident in the North East. There were individuals across the globe who were well informed about the situation and did not target the entire Muslim community and did not indulge in hate messages. Therefore such

secular mentality is the need of the hour and this message is not only to be inculcate in the youth, but amongst individuals of all age groups (which is the case in the current study), so that the seed of communalism is not allowed to breed in the North Eastern society, and to foster in harmony.

10. Conclusion:

It can be concluded that, Discrimination in any form, whether on a daily basis or on the basis of a lifetime, is not healthy for the society and will not benefit anyone. Discrimination may breed from any source, whether it is prejudice towards a particular individual, group or community, stereotypes etc. It can be shaped by factors operating at various levels and most often, the specific underlying mechanisms are very difficult to observe. Therefore, attempts have to be made at the organizational, national and most importantly at individual level to eradicate this evil from the society. Individuals of all age groups have a crucial responsibility in this concern. There can be suggestions of inclusion of tolerance related aspects as mandatory courses in the school syllabi. Children should learn about sensitivity for other people and groups from a very early age. Multiculturalism is the need of the hour, and the responsibility to spread this message is vested in the shoulders of individuals of all age groups to make North East India a region wherein Discrimination vanishes and there is usher of greater peace and harmony.

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