Resilience Among Minority Students at Secondary vs Higher Secondary Level in Selected Districts of West Bengal

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Abstract

Present study sought to understand and compare the resilience of minority students in classes 9-10 (secondary) and 11-12 (higher secondary) in some selected districts of West Bengal. It looked at three key areas of strength as a student's Personal Skills, their Relationship with Caregivers, and their Sense of Belonging. Using a quantitative descriptive survey method, data was gathered from 616 students with the help of CYRM-28 questionnaire. The main findings show an important shift in resilience. Students in higher secondary showed stronger Personal Skills but felt a weaker Sense of Belonging compared to secondary students. Their family relationships, however, remained a steady source of support. Girls were found to draw significantly more strength from their relationships and sense of community than boys. Most critically, the presence of domestic violence at home was identified as a major risk, significantly weakening a student's resilience in all three areas.

Keywords: Resilience, Minority Students, Educational Transition, Domestic Violence

Introduction

The path of education for minority students in West Bengal is shaped by a mix of social, political, and economic factors. While the state has a history of improving education and its literacy rate is better than the country's average, major gaps remain for religious and linguistic minorities. The Muslim community, making up over 27% of the state's people (Census of India, 2011), faces particular challenges (Sikand, 2015). For these groups, education involves a double task: dealing with system-wide obstacles while also using the strengths of their own community.

The problems are many-sided. Economically, many minority families, especially in districts like Murshidabad, Malda, and North 24 Parganas, are poor. This directly affects schooling, as children might need to work, girls might marry early, and families cannot pay for extra tuition or books (Husain, 2015). Language is another issue. Most state schools teach in Bengali, which can be a first hurdle for Urdu-speaking students or those from tribal groups like the Santals.

Perhaps most importantly, there is often an "aspirations gap." The community's past experiences and a feeling of unfairness in college admissions or jobs can lower educational goals (Kundu, 2014). This creates a cycle where fewer students join or complete higher classes. Given these layered difficulties, studying resilience; how students overcome such challenges; is not just theory. It is a vital look into how educational survival and success are truly achieved.

Concept of Resilience

For this study, researcher see resilience not as a fixed quality a person is born with, but as an active process of doing well despite facing serious difficulties (Masten, 2014). It is understandable that in three connected areas relevant to school life as -

- **Psychological Resilience:** The inner strength to handle school stress, bounce back from failures like a bad exam, and control emotions while staying hopeful. It includes belief in one's own ability and feeling in control of academic results (Singh & Jha, 2013).

- **Academic Resilience:** This specifically means achieving good results in school even when circumstances are tough. It shows in not giving up studies, attending school regularly, using smart study methods, and meeting academic goals (Martin & Marsh, 2020).

- **Social Resilience:** The ability to find and use supportive resources from one's surroundings. This means getting help from teachers, building good friendships, and drawing strength from family and community ties, all of which protect against stress (Ungar, 2018).

Using these three areas together gives a complete picture. It shows how minority students don't just survive but actively use their environment to succeed, focusing on their strengths rather than their weaknesses.

Significance of the study

Comparing the Secondary (Classes IX-X) and Higher Secondary (Classes XI-XII) levels is key to understanding how resilience changes during a critical point in a student's life. This time is not just about moving to a higher class; it is a major personal and social turning point.

First, the move itself is stressful. Going from the broader, more sheltered secondary syllabus to choosing a specialized stream (Science, Arts, Commerce) in higher secondary means big changes in studies and social life. It can break old support systems, testing a student's resilience anew (Benner, 2011). A comparison can show if their coping strengths remain steady or need to be rebuilt.

Second, academic pressure increases and changes. Secondary school ends with the important Madhyamik board exam. But higher secondary brings constant pressure from a harder syllabus, the need to understand concepts deeply, and the upcoming challenge of competitive entrance exams for college. The needed resilience may shift from preparing for one big exam to handling long-term, building stress (Deb et al., 2020).

Third, this age is about discovering one's identity. Teenagers explore who they are. For minority students, this often means balancing two identities; their community identity and their identity as a student in a larger world (Phinney, 2015). The higher secondary stage, with more influence from friends and exposure to career options, can make this balancing act more intense, making social resilience and self-belief very important.

Finally, choosing a career becomes real and urgent. While secondary school gives a base, the stream chosen in higher secondary directly shapes future job options. For minority students from families with limited money or contacts, this choice is very stressful. Resilience here means dealing with less guidance, balancing personal dreams with family hopes, and staying motivated towards a future that is still unclear (Patton & Creed, 2015).

Therefore, comparing these two levels is not about saying one group is stronger. It is about tracing the path of resilience. It asks: How do the sources, signs, and tests of resilience change as minority students grow from early to late teens within West Bengal's school system? The answers are essential to create the right support for students at each specific stage of their educational journey.

Operational Definition

i. Resilience among minority students: To measure resilience in the minority students, researcher used a well-regarded tool named The Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-28). This is a set of 28 questions developed by researchers Unger and Liebenberg in 2011. The questions explore three key areas: personal skills, relationship with caregivers, and sense of belongingness. Students responded to each question using a simple 3-point scale. A higher total score from the questionnaire indicates a greater level of resilience in the student.

Research Questions

Upon reviewing previous studies on resilience and its links to various personal background factors, the researcher found many differing results. This helped identify clear gaps in our understanding of this topic in the specific context. Notably, almost no research was found that directly compares secondary and higher secondary level minority students in West Bengal. Based on these gaps, the following research questions were formed:

1. What is the current level of resilience among minority students at the Secondary and Higher Secondary stages in West Bengal?

2. Does a difference exist in the resilience of minority students between the Secondary and Higher Secondary stages in West Bengal?

3. How do different personal background factors affect and create variation in the resilience of minority students at the Secondary and Higher Secondary stages in West Bengal?

Research Objectives

The objectives for this study were set directly from the research questions and are as follows -

a. To find out the existing status of resilience (personal skills, relationship with caregivers, and sense of belongingness) among minority students at the Secondary and Higher Secondary stages in West Bengal.

b. To compare the difference in resilience (personal skills, relationship with caregivers, and sense of belongingness) among minority students at the Secondary and Higher Secondary stages in West Bengal.

c. To find out the variation in in resilience (personal skills, relationship with caregivers, and sense of belongingness) among minority students at the Secondary and Higher Secondary stages in West Bengal with respect to their gender.

d. To find out the variation in in resilience (personal skills, relationship with caregivers, and sense of belongingness) among minority students at the Secondary and Higher Secondary stages in West Bengal with respect to domestic violence in their family.

e. To find out the variation in in resilience (personal skills, relationship with caregivers, and sense of belongingness) among minority students at the Secondary and Higher Secondary stages in West Bengal with respect to death of close family member.

Research Hypotheses

Following null hypotheses were framed based on research objectives as follows –

H_01 – There exists no significant difference in resilience (personal skills, relationship with caregivers, and sense of belongingness) between Secondary and Higher Secondary level minority students.

H_02 - There exists no significant difference in resilience (personal skills, relationship with caregivers, and sense of belongingness) between male and female minority students.

H_03 - There exists no significant difference in resilience (personal skills, relationship with caregivers, and sense of belongingness) with respect to domestic violence in their family.

H_04 - There exists no significant difference in resilience (personal skills, relationship with caregivers, and sense of belongingness) with respect to death of close family member.

Methodology

This study used a quantitative survey method to understand the level of resilience among minority students in classes 9 through 12 in West Bengal. To collect the right data, the researcher used a purposive sampling technique. All secondary and higher secondary minority students in the state were considered as the larger group, while 616 students from various government schools were chosen to represent this group as the study's sample.

In this research, resilience was the main outcome, or the dependent variable, being observed. Demographic factors such as the student's educational level (secondary or higher secondary), gender, whether there is domestic violence in their family, and if there has been a recent death in the family were treated as the independent variables that might variate resilience.

To measure resilience, the researcher employed a trusted tool name 'The Child and Youth Resilience Measure' (CYRM-28). This is a 28-question set developed by researchers Unger and Liebenberg in 2011. The questions cover three important areas as a student's personal skills, their relationship with parents or guardians, and their feeling of belonging. Students gave their responses using a straightforward 3-point scale for each item. Before using the questionnaire, the researcher thoroughly checked and confirmed its reliability and validity to ensure the results would be accurate and meaningful.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Showing mean wise distribution of resilience.

Independent Variables		Personal Skills		Relation with caregivers		Sense of belongingness	
Variable	Category	N	mean ± sd	N	mean ± sd	N	mean ± sd
Educational Level	Secondary	259	30.51 ± 1.96	259	20.05 ± 1.42	259	28.03 ± 1.74
	Higher Secondary	357	30.83 ± 1.89	357	20.07 ± 1.49	357	27.61± 1.80
Gender	Male	258	30.87 ± 1.80	258	19.87 ± 1.83	258	27.58 ± 1.92
	Female	358	30.57 ± 2.00	358	20.20 ± 1.09	358	27.94 ± 1.68
Domestic violence in family	No	520	30.77 ± 1.92	520	20.16 ± 1.30	520	27.85 ± 1.72
	Yes	96	30.28 ± 1.90	96	19.55 ± 2.04	96	27.45 ± 2.10
Death of close family member	No	253	30.54 ± 1.93	253	20.19 ± 1.22	253	27.79 ± 1.75
	Yes	363	30.81 ± 1.91	363	19.98 ± 1.60	363	27.79 ± 1.82

This table showed a comparison of resilience scores in three main areas; Personal Skills, Relationship with Caregivers, and Sense of Belonging based on four factors as Education Level, Gender, whether there is Domestic Violence at home, and whether a Close Family Member has passed away.

i. By Education Level (Secondary vs. Higher Secondary)

Personal Skills Scores are very close, with a tiny increase in higher secondary (mean ± sd =30.83 ± 1.89) than secondary level (mean ± sd =30.51 ± 1.96). in relationship with Caregivers, the scores are almost the same for secondary (mean ± sd = 20.05 ± 1.42) and higher secondary level (mean ± sd =20.07 ± 1.49). In the case of sense of belonging; there is a noticeable drop for higher secondary (mean ± sd =27.61 ± 1.80) students than secondary (mean ± sd =28.03 ± 1.74) students.

ii. By gender (Male vs. Female)

In personal skills, scores are slightly higher among male students (mean ± sd =30.87 ±

1.80) compared to female students (mean ± sd =30.57 ± 2.00). In relationship with caregivers, scores are higher among female students (mean ± sd =19.87 ± 1.83) compared to male (mean ± sd =20.20 ± 1.09). In sense of belonging, female students (mean ± sd =27.58 ± 1.92) report a higher sense of belonging than male students (mean ± sd =27.94 ± 1.68).

iii. By experience of domestic violence (No vs. Yes)

This variable showed the strongest and most consistent impact. Students who reported domestic violence at home had lower scores in all three areas; personal skills, relationship with caregivers, and sense of belonging. The biggest difference was in relationship with caregivers.

iv. By death of a close family member (No vs. Yes)

In personal skills, scores were slightly higher for students who had experienced a loss (mean ± sd =30.54 ± 1.93) than who does not (mean ± sd =30.81 ± 1.91). In relationship with caregivers, scores were a bit lower in this group and sense of belonging category, the Scores were the same for both groups (mean=27.79).

Hypotheses testing

Table 2: Showing hypotheses testing in accordance to framed hypotheses

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Remarks*	Hypotheses testing (Null/H_0) (0.05 level)
Educational Level	Personal Skills	-2.016	614	0.044	*S (p<0.05)	**Rejected**
	Relation with caregivers	-0.167	614	0.867	*NS (p>0.05)	**Failed to reject**
	Sense of belongingness	2.866	614	0.004	*S (p<0.05)	**Rejected**
Gender	Personal Skills	1.886	614	0.060	*NS (p>0.05)	**Failed to reject**
	Relation with caregivers	-2.761	614	0.006	*S (p<0.05)	**Rejected**
	Sense of belongingness	-2.460	614	0.014	*S (p<0.05)	**Rejected**
	Personal Skills				*S	**Rejected**

Domestic violence in family		2.310	614	0.021	(p<0.05)	
	Relation with caregivers	3.776	614	0.000	*S (p<0.05)	**Rejected**
	Sense of belongingness	2.017	614	0.044	*S (p<0.05)	**Rejected**
Death of close family member	Personal Skills	-1.715	614	0.087	*NS (p>0.05)	**Failed to reject**
	Relation with caregivers	1.770	614	0.077	*NS (p>0.05)	**Failed to reject**
	Sense of belongingness	0.010	614	0.992	*NS (p>0.05)	**Failed to reject**

*S – Significant, *NS – Not Significant

Major Findings

- Resilience is not the same at different school levels. Higher Secondary students show significantly stronger Personal Skills than Secondary students. However, this gain comes with a loss, as Secondary students feel a significantly stronger Sense of Belonging. The support from family (Relation with Caregivers) remains steady and strong for both groups. This shows that resilience changes shape as students move through school.

- Boys and girls build resilience in different ways. Girls draw significantly more strength from their social world, from their Relations with Caregivers and their Sense of Belonging compared to boys. There is no major difference between boys and girls in their Personal Skills, meaning their inner coping abilities are developed similarly.

- Having domestic violence in the family is the biggest factor that weakens resilience. It causes a significant drop in scores across all three areas: Personal Skills, Relations with Caregivers, and Sense of Belonging. The damage is greatest in Relations with Caregivers, directly harming a key source of support. This shows domestic violence is a deep-rooted risk that damages multiple foundations of a student's strength at once.

- Different difficult experiences affect resilience differently. While domestic violence has a strong negative link, the death of a close family member, in this study, did not show a significant connection to lower resilience scores. This important difference suggests that the ongoing, personal stress of violence at home is more harmful to a student's resilience than the intense, but non-personal, grief from losing a family member.

Conclusion

This study offered a detailed and comparative look at the state of resilience among minority students during a crucial phase of their education in West Bengal. The results strongly challenge

the idea that resilience is a single, unchanging quality. Instead, they showed it is a dynamic and multi-layered strength that changes significantly between the secondary and higher secondary levels. Researcher observed a clear "resilience transition." As students move to higher classes, they gain more personal coping skills (Alam, 2018), but this comes at the cost of feeling less connected to their school and peers. This supports the understanding that growing up involves learning to rely more on oneself and less on outside support (Masten, 2014). It highlights a vital need for schools to actively create a welcoming and supportive environment in higher secondary to make up for this lost sense of belonging.

The study also showed different paths for boys and girls. Girls draw significantly more strength from their relationships with family and their sense of community. This fits with the understanding that in societies which value community, connectedness is a key source of resilience for girls (Ungar, 2018). Most importantly, the research clearly identifies domestic violence at home as the most powerful and widespread threat to a student's resilience. Its most damaging effect is on the child's relationship with their caregivers; the very bond that should be a source of safety. This urgent finding calls for schools to adopt practices that recognize trauma and to provide safe, confidential ways for students to report problems at home (Cénat et al., 2021). The fact that the loss of a family member did not show a similar negative effect suggests that not all hardship automatically breaks down resilience. The damage is most severe from ongoing, interpersonal threats like violence.

In conclusion, building resilience in minority students requires a thoughtful, multi-step strategy. Support must be tailored to the specific needs of each educational stage, recognize the different ways boys and girls find strength, and actively protect students from the deep harm of domestic violence. Future education policy must look beyond just academic help. It must consciously work to strengthen the key social and personal foundations—a feeling of belonging, safe relationships, and a sense of personal control—that allow students to persist and succeed.

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