



A Study on Hegemonic Masculinity, Psychological Distress and Help-Seeking Attitude among Young Males

Debanjali Roy Choudhury

M.A., Psychology, Banaras Hindu University, India.

ABSTRACT

Hegemonic masculinity states the endorsement of men in the ideals of masculinity. Research studies suggest that traditional masculine ideologies are closely linked to psychological distress i.e., depression, anxiety, and stress. These various ideologies in men can further also lead to the reluctance to seek psychological help, followed by detrimental consequences like suicide. Such ideologies come under hegemonic masculinity that demonstrates a dominant position of men in society by internalizing codes of conduct. Any man adhering to hegemonic masculinity display aggressiveness, toughness, heterosexuality, etc. The current study investigates the influence of hegemonic masculinity on psychological distress and help-seeking behavior among men aged 20-30 years. Standardized scales were used to measure conformity to masculinity, psychological distress, and help-seeking behavior. The result found no significant correlation between hegemonic masculinity and psychological distress and a positive correlation between a) hegemonic masculinity and help-seeking behavior and b) psychological distress and help-seeking behavior, inconsistent with many research studies, potentially calling into question. Variations in terms of sampling technique, research design, and other factors like culture, and socio-economic status is recommended.

Keywords: Hegemonic masculinity, psychological distress, help-seeking attitude, young men

Introduction

In a survey conducted by the National Mental Health Survey (NMHS) of 2015–2016, Indian men showed a slightly higher current prevalence rate of bipolar affective disorder (0.3%) when compared to women (0.2%). It further showed that Indian men (13.3%) were nearly twice as likely to currently experience common mental morbidity like depression (excluding depression with psychotic symptoms), neurosis, and substance use disorders (excluding tobacco use disorders) as women (6.9%) and slightly higher (1.0%) prevalence rate to currently experiencing severe mental disorders like bipolar affective disorders, non-affective psychosis, and severe depression with psychotic symptoms as women (1.0%). The reported statistics clearly show the vulnerability of the Indian population to various mental health issues, especially men.

The probable cause of their struggle can be attributed to the hegemonic masculine norms and ideologies of “*manhood*”, “*machismo*” or “*macho*” which further can prevent men from seeking professional help. Hegemonic masculinity is also known as “toxic masculinity” which is the most dominant form of masculinity that has set standards for young men to become real men in society. This can be demanding causing psychological distress in men that is as feelings of stress, depression, and anxiety. Trapped in a vicious circle of such norms and psychological distress, they often find it against “*men’s ideals*” to seek professional help. Such ideals are frequently normalized by notions like “*boys don’t cry*”, “*be a man*”, “*men will be men*”, “*man-up*”, “*real men don’t ...*” etc.

A study conducted on the role of multidimensional masculine norms on depression and mental health service utilization among emerging adult men in the U.S revealed less mental health service utilization of those who were endorsed to anti-femininity and toughness norms. This effect was even more for those who were depressed (Sileo & Kershaw, 2020).

Hegemonic Masculinity

The term Hegemonic Masculinity was first used in a work by Raewyn Connell in 1982 on Gender and Power. It can also be called “toxic masculinity.” Connell (1995), defined hegemonic masculinity “as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.” It also tells us why and how the other gender roles and identities are considered as less powerful and women-like or “feminine.” in a particular society. General traits associated with this concept are physical dominance, emotional strength, independence, power, aggression, self-reliance, adventure-seeking, assertiveness, heterosexuality, and so on.

According a study by Mahalik, Burna & Syzdek (2007), on masculinity and men's perceptions of the normativeness of men's and women's health behavior in predicting men's self-reported health behaviors reported consistent findings with previous research stating that traditional masculine gender

socialization and social norms models influence men to engage in health risk behaviors. For example, smoking, excessive drinking, or refusing to wear a seatbelt.

In a study by Rosen and Nofziger (2018), boys who were the victim of bullying by their peers reported shrugging off their experiences to appear masculine as accepting might make them vulnerable and defeated.

Psychological Distress

Psychological distress is an umbrella term for the nonspecific and undifferentiated signs and symptoms of stress, depression, and anxiety experienced by an individual. Psychological distress is defined by Mirowsky & Ross (2002), as a state of emotional suffering characterized by symptoms of depression (e.g., lost interest; sadness; hopelessness) and anxiety (e.g., restlessness; feeling tense).

High levels of psychological symptoms correlated with components of masculine role conflict (Good et al., 2004).

In a study conducted by Herreen et al., (2021) on conformity to masculine norms and depression in 12,516 males aged 15-55 years strict adherence to masculine norms had been closely linked with deleterious consequences on the physical and mental health of men.

It was found in a study by Oliffe et al., (2012) that the embodiment of depression in terms of anger, isolation, and autonomy around self-management techniques and risky practices like substance abuse can be misinterpreted as expressions of masculine ideals rather than distress.

Help-Seeking Behavior

Help-Seeking Behaviour is defined as any action of energetically seeking help from the health care services or trusted people in the community and includes understanding, guidance, treatment, and general support when feeling in trouble or encountering stressful circumstances (Umubyeyi et al., 2016).

As compared to women, help-seeking and consultation behavior for psychosocial problems and distress were not found in men (Corney, 1990).

According to Biddle et al., (2004) young adults, especially men are unlikely to seek help unless they are severely distressed, which may be important in understanding the high suicide rate among men. According to Milner, Shields & King (2019), conformity or adherence to masculine norms like self-reliance is identified as a predictor of lower health literacy among men. It further revealed poor mental health conditions like having depressive symptoms can also be a predictor of lower health literacy. Researchers suggest the need for health literacy media campaigns that can address the complexities of gendered help-seeking behaviors.

Purpose

The purpose of the research is to study hegemonic masculinity and its influence on psychological distress and help-seeking attitude among young males.

Hypothesis

1. There will be a positive correlation between hegemonic masculinity and psychological distress.
2. There will be a negative correlation between hegemonic masculinity and a help-seeking attitude.
3. There will be a negative correlation between psychological distress and a help-seeking attitude.

Sample

A total of 30 young men participated from across Kolkata. The age of the subjects ranges from 20 to 30 years.

Measures

1. **Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory-22 (CMNI-22)** given by Burns & Mahalik (2008), consists of 22 items which is the short version of the 94-item CMNI. It assesses masculinity over 11 dimensions on a 4-point Likert scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".
2. **Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10)** given by Kessler et al., (2003) is a simple measure of psychological distress. It involves 10 questions about emotional states each with a five-level response scale.
3. **Self-Stigma Of Seeking Psychology Help (SSOSH)** scale given by Vogel, Wade, & Haake (2006), consists of 10 items measured on a 5-point scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were filled through Google forms; each participant was thanked properly for their cooperation. Standardized Psychological Tests were administered to the participants.

Analysis of Data

The responses of participants were analyzed using correlation to see the relationship between hegemonic masculinity, psychological distress, and help-seeking behavior of young Indian men. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics that is the Mean and Standard deviation data of the sample whereas table 2 shows the correlation between hegemonic masculinity, psychological distress, and help-seeking behavior.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation)

	Hegemonic masculinity	Distress	Help-seeking
N	30	30	30
Mean	31.9	24.6	24.7
Standard deviation	5.08	7.46	6.98

Table 2: Correlation

	Masculinity		Distress		Help-seeking
Masculinity	—				
Distress	0.242		—		
Help-seeking	0.462	*	0.442	*	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Discussion of Results

The results found that there is no significant relationship between hegemonic masculinity and psychological distress. The results also found that there is a significant positive correlation between hegemonic masculinity and help-seeking behavior ($r=0.462$, $p<.05$). It further found that there is a significant positive correlation between help-seeking behavior and psychological distress ($r=0.442$, $p<.05$).

Unlike previous studies, the findings of the current study failed to favor the notion that hegemonic masculinity in young men can be associated with higher psychological distress and lower help-seeking behavior. This study's findings are consistent with literature by Good, Hepper, DeBord, and Fischer (2004) which failed to support the notion that the degree of masculine role conflict is strongly linked with psychological distress in men.

Masculinity cannot solely be the predictor of lesser help-seeking. This is consistent with the study by Lane and Addis (2005), which revealed a variation in the willingness of men's help-seeking behavior across cultures and types of helpers. For example, according to Neighbors, Mysick and Williams (1988), African Americans are less reluctant than European Americans towards help-seeking.

Conclusion

The research study comprehends the relationship between hegemonic masculinity, psychological distress, and help-seeking behavior among young Indian men. It reveals no significant correlation between hegemonic masculinity and psychological distress which can be supported by the fact that masculinity cannot be the sole predictor of distress. It also reveals a significant positive correlation between hegemonic masculinity and help-seeking behavior. This might be due to reluctance in seeking help can vary from cultures to cultures, the type of problem under consideration, and also from individual to individual keeping in mind individual differences. It further reveals a significant positive correlation between psychological distress and help-seeking behavior.

Future researchers could use other sampling techniques other than snowball sampling as used in this study. Further, it should encourage more cross-cultural studies concerning masculinity and help-seeking among men. The role of individual differences, socioeconomic status, socio-demographic differences, type of problem, etc can also be taken under consideration. Additionally, it should adopt a better research methodology other than correlation.

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