

Peer Review

Review of: "Social Class, Gender and Psychological Distress in Mumbai: Risk and Protective Factors"

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This research article investigates the intersection of social class, gender, and psychological distress in Mumbai, addressing an important and contextually relevant public health issue in low- and middle-income settings. The manuscript demonstrates several strengths, particularly its focus on intersectionality, integrating socio-economic determinants with gender-based vulnerabilities in mental health. The inclusion of both risk and protective psychological factors, such as hope and positive emotional style, provides a multidimensional framework that moves beyond traditional deficit-based mental health models. Additionally, the study benefits from a relatively large community sample and the use of validated psychometric tools, including the GHQ-28 and Trait Hope Scale, which strengthen the credibility of the findings. The stratified analyses across socio-economic groups and gender categories offer nuanced insights into variations in distress presentation, particularly the identification of middle-income women as a potentially overlooked vulnerable population.

However, several methodological limitations reduce the robustness and generalizability of the findings. The cross-sectional design limits causal inference, preventing determination of temporal relationships between socio-economic factors, psychological variables, and depressive symptoms. The use of different sampling approaches for the two socio-economic groups (community random sampling for the lower-income group and snowball sampling for the middle-income group) may introduce sampling bias and limit comparability between groups. Furthermore, reliance on self-reported measures for health status, behavioral variables, and psychological outcomes increases susceptibility to reporting bias and social desirability effects.

The psychometric reliability of some scales used in the study raises additional concerns. The relatively low internal consistency reported for the Positive Emotional Style scale and the short version of the

Perceived Stress Scale may affect measurement precision and interpretation of protective factors. Greater justification for retaining these measures despite modest reliability values would strengthen methodological transparency. Additionally, several potentially relevant confounding variables, such as social support, marital conflict, occupational stress, exposure to domestic violence, and access to healthcare services, were not comprehensively assessed, which may influence psychological distress outcomes.

While the statistical analyses are generally appropriate, the manuscript could benefit from clearer reporting of model assumptions, effect sizes, and multicollinearity diagnostics. The presentation of regression results is detailed but occasionally difficult to interpret due to the large number of variables and subgroup analyses. Greater synthesis of key findings would improve readability and strengthen the clinical and public health relevance of the results.

Overall, this study provides valuable insight into socio-cultural determinants of psychological distress in urban India and highlights the importance of incorporating protective psychological factors into mental health research and interventions. Future studies using longitudinal designs, standardized sampling strategies, and broader psychosocial assessments would further strengthen evidence in this area and enhance the translational applicability of the findings.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.