



# **Sexual Abuse and Its Impact on Achievement Motivation: A Comparative Study between Sexually Abused and Non-sexually Abused Adolescents**

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Authors JH and KS designed the study, carried out the research and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors ON and BNV managed the analyses of the data. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Aims:** To compare the levels of achievement motivation between sexually abused and non-sexually abused adolescents; to assess significant gender differences in achievement motivation between sexually abused and non-sexually abused adolescents.

**Study Design:** The present study was ex-post facto in nature. The purposive sampling method was employed to select the participants for the study. The sample of the study was administered the Deo-Mohan Achievement Motivation scale through one to one interaction.

**Place and Duration of Study:** The sample was selected from educational institutions (Schools and Colleges) and Non-Governmental Organizations from Goa. The duration of the study was February 2013 to February 2017.

**Methodology:** Permission was obtained from concerned authorities i.e., the incharges of the schools, colleges, and Non-government organizations for conducting the study. The participants were contacted personally and after assuring confidentiality and obtaining informed consent, the Deo-Mohan Achievement Motivation Scale and the personal and socio-demographic information questionnaire were administered. The obtained raw scores were converted into standard scores and analyzed using t-test.

**Sample:** Sexually abused and non-sexually abused adolescents in the age group of 11 to 18 years were selected in the study. Sexually abused adolescents included those adolescents who have been victims of any form of sexual abuse (Contact abuse: includes oral, vaginal and anal penetration, touching, kissing and masturbation; Non-contact sexual abuse: includes deliberate exposure of breasts or genitalia or witnessing a sexual act, either live or in films and photographs in print or electronic form). Non-sexually abused adolescents include those adolescents who have never been a victim of any form of sexual abuse. The total sample used in the study was 392. Of them, 192 were sexually abused adolescents (78 Males, 114 Females) and 200 were sexually non-abused adolescents (100 Males, 100 Females).

**Results:** Significantly low mean scores were obtained on achievement motivation by sexually abused adolescents (102.35, SD 17.10) while high mean scores were obtained by non-sexually abused adolescents (136.43, SD 16.67). The 't' analyses ( $t=9.97$ ,  $P<0.01$ ) revealed significant difference among the sample groups with sexually abused adolescents having a lower achievement motivation than non-sexually abused adolescents. To highlight the gender difference gender analyses was carried out separately.

Significantly higher mean scores (116.33, SD 23.25) were obtained on achievement motivation by sexually abused male adolescents while sexually abused female adolescents obtained a lower mean scores (102.65, SD 15.22). The 't' analyses ( $t= 1.96$ ,  $p< 0.05$ ) revealed significant differences between male and female sexually abused adolescents with males having a higher achievement motivation than females.

No significant differences were obtained on achievement motivation among non-sexually abused male 139.50 (SD 14.35) and female adolescents 135.18 (SD 17.04).

**Conclusion:** It was found that sexually abused adolescents have significantly lower levels of achievement motivation than non-sexually abused adolescents. A significant difference was observed in achievement motivation among sexually abused adolescents with regard to gender with females having a lower level of achievement motivation than males. No significant difference was noticed in achievement motivation among non-sexually abused adolescents with regard to gender.

*Keywords: Adolescents; sexual abuse and non-sexual abuse; achievement motivation.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence – the period of life between the onset of puberty and the full commitment to an adult social role – is a very challenging time where every adolescent has to remake their personality and has to free oneself from childhood ties with parents and they find their place in the world, besides establishing new identifications with peers, and finding their own identity, in addition to experiencing a variety of other important events, such as peer group changes, school moves, changes in family structure or functioning, and alterations in societal and community expectations [1,2] and in this entire process, adolescents have to face a lot of conflicts within themselves and the people around. In addition to all this, unfortunately, many adolescents are further challenged by being victims of abuse and more so, sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse is a general term for any type of sexual activity inflicted on a child by someone with whom the child is acquainted. It is considered an especially heinous crime because the abuser occupies a position of trust. Until the 1970s, the prevalence of sexual abuse was seriously underestimated. The growing awareness of the problem led legislatures to enact reporting requirements, which mandate that any professional person (doctor, nurse, teacher, social worker) who knows or has reason to believe that a child is being abused, report this information to the local Welfare agency or law enforcement department [3].

Sexual abuse is a significant worldwide problem [4] that affects tens of thousands of children and adolescents every year and the scale of which was largely unrecognised until the late 1970s [5]. The World Health Organization [6] estimates that 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18

have experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence involving physical contact, though this is certainly an underestimate. Much of this sexual violence is inflicted by family members or other people residing in or visiting a child's family home - people normally trusted by children and often responsible for their care.

The effects and incidence of adolescent abuse may be overlooked for various reasons [7,8]. Sexual abuse of adolescents is believed to be more underreported than sexual abuse of children because the public does not perceive adolescents to be at as much risk and adolescents are seen as better able to fight back or remove themselves from the situation. Abuse in adolescence is thought to be harder to identify; there is often confusion between some of the tell-tale, acting-out behaviours that are present in child victims and the normal developmental changes that are present in many adolescents [7]. However, the widespread prevalence of sexual abuse and the numerous problems and consequences associated with it have been increasingly recognized in recent decades [9, 10].

Research conducted over the past decade indicates that a wide range of psychological and interpersonal problems are more prevalent among those who have been sexually abused than among individuals with no such experiences. Although a definitive causal relationship between such difficulties and sexual abuse cannot be established using current retrospective research methodologies, the aggregate of consistent findings has led many researchers and clinicians to conclude that sexual abuse is a major risk factor for a variety of problems, both in the short term and in later adult functioning [11].

The manner in which an individual progress after experiencing an abuse situation depends on the individual's personality, the type of abuse, the length of time the individual was abused, family support, and the professional support services available. Usually, victims of abuse require extensive psychotherapy to deal with emotional distress associated with the incident. Victims of abuse may have a variety of emotional problems including depression, acts of suicide, post-traumatic stress disorder, and anxiety disorder. While many may resort to unproductive ways of coping like indulging in substance abuse as a way to avoid dealing with their emotions [12].

## 1.1 Achievement Motivation

Achievement motivation can best be understood by examining the meanings of "achievement" and "motivation" separately. Achievement typically stresses the importance of accomplishment and attainment with the effort involved [13]. Motivation relates to an individual's reason for engaging in an activity, the degree to which an individual pursues the activity, and the persistence of the individual [14]. Achievement motivation is thus defined as the striving to increase or to keep as high as possible one's own capabilities in all activities in which a standard of excellence is thought to apply and where the execution of such activities can, therefore either succeed or fail [15].

Some people have an intense desire to achieve while others are not so keen on achievement. McClelland studied this phenomenon and proposed his Achievement Motivation Theory according to which there are certain needs that are learned and socially acquired as the individual interacts with the environment. McClelland classified such needs into three broad categories. These are (a) Need for power, (b) Need for affiliation, and (c) Need for achievement.

Adolescence is one of the important periods of life and the influence of an adolescent's needs and desires both have a strong impact on the direction of their behaviour and their yearning to achieve. Most adolescents tend to fall somewhere in the middle of the achievement scale between extremely high achievers and those who may not achieve at all [16]. Everyone has a need to achieve and a fear of failure, but these needs vary from person to person and from situation to situation. Achievement can often bring benefits, and failure can often bring shame [17, 18]. Each adolescent acts on the levels of motivation differently, but some students are predisposed to having little desire to accomplish certain tasks [19].

## 1.2 Sexual Abuse and Achievement Motivation

Sexual abuse has a devastating impact on the victim. While most people cherish good memories of childhood and adolescence, realities are different for some children and adolescents who unfortunately become victims of sexual abuse. Childhood is simply denied to these children.

Adolescents with a sexual abuse history exhibit a wide range of emotional and behavioural problems [20]. Most notably, investigators have consistently found that adolescent survivors of child sexual abuse report greater depression and general psychological distress, more conduct problems and aggression, lower self-esteem, and more substance abuse problems [21-24]. Some researchers have also suggested that child sexual abuse leads to distortions that undermine the survivor's critical motivational, coping, and interpersonal factors and that these in turn influence adult sexual behaviour and choices [25].

The need and desire to achieve is basic and natural in human beings as the other biological or socio-psychological needs and desires. Staying motivated keeps a person active and gives a feeling of being in control. Experiencing traumatic events, such as sexual abuse often leads to serious changes in the psychological makeup of a person. The traumatic sequel includes changes in motivation, cognition, and emotion [26].

Motivation is an umbrella term for a wide array of cognitive and affective processes that are involved in goal-directed behaviour. Goals, which are defined as "internal representations of desired states, where states are broadly construed as outcomes, events, or processes" [27], are at the centre of motivational analysis [28]. In the context of trauma, individuals respond to a traumatic event with intense fear, helplessness, or horror, and they perceive the stressor as uncontrollable or unpredictable [29]. Undergoing uncontrollable adversities can lead to learned helplessness [30] and, consequently, negatively influence outcome expectations. From a psycho-traumatological perspective, it can be assumed that a person who has become a victim of chronic sexual abuse will show diminished initiative to actively respond to life requirements in comparison to a non-traumatized person of the same age. Moreover, the person may be unable to learn from successful experiences, engage in less or restricted future planning, and develop effective deficits, such as anxiety or depression.

Research on motivation has burgeoned over the past four decades. As a result, much has been learned about the nature of motivation. During the past half-century, a variety of crucial motivational beliefs, values, and goals have been identified and examined [31]. Some studies have focused on competence-related beliefs as a valuable measure of an individual's achievement

motivation [32,33]. Males and females were found to have different competence-related beliefs during childhood and adolescence [33]. Adolescents sexually abused in childhood show greater overall adjustment difficulties, poorer social competence, decreased language ability, and poorer overall school performance than non-abused adolescents [34]. A meta-analysis of published research [35] on the effects of child sexual abuse for 6 outcomes: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, suicide, sexual promiscuity, victim-perpetrator cycle, and poor academic performance. A previously conducted study revealed that adolescents sexually abused in childhood show greater overall adjustment difficulties, poorer social competence, decreased language ability, and poorer overall school performance than non-abused adolescents [34]. Another study examined the effect of experience of violence including sexual abuse during childhood on the later academic achievement. The results show that exposure to violence during childhood not only directly influences young people's educational outcomes but also exerts indirect influences on their achievement through its impact on young victims' social relations and psychological health [36].

Gender differences and factors influencing achievement motivation have been investigated by several researchers. The effects of gender, economic background, and caste differences on achievement motivation possessed by college students were explored on the basis of societal transformation [37]. Along with other findings, male students were found to be having a high achievement motivation while female students having a below average level of achievement motivation. Researchers who examined the achievement motivation of adolescents found that males and females have different competence-related beliefs during childhood and adolescence [33]. The study also revealed that males had higher competence beliefs in sports activities and math compared to females. However, females had higher competence beliefs in reading, English, and social activities compared to males. Further, a similar research also found significant differences in achievement motivation of male and female senior high school students, and male students have higher achievement motivations than female students; the achievement motivations of students studying science and students studying arts have difference closely to significant difference [38].

Various people from all over the world, as well as those who have been victims of sexual abuse has been subject to researches to time immemorial. However, in comparison to the west, in India and specifically in Goa, limited scientific research has been carried out in the area of sexual abuse. Studies with regard to sexual abuse and achievement motivation are the bare minimum. This is what intrigued the researcher to carry out this investigation.

### 1.3 Research Questions

1. Do sexually abused and non-sexually abused adolescents differ with regard to their achievement motivation?
2. Do significant differences exist in achievement motivation among sexually abused adolescents and non-sexually abused adolescents with regard to gender?

### 1.4 Hypotheses

1. The level of achievement motivation of sexually abused adolescents will be significantly lower than non-sexually abused adolescents.
2. Significant differences exist in achievement motivation among sexually abused adolescents and sexually non-sexually abused adolescents with regard to gender.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Study Sample

For the present study, purposive sampling method was used and sexually abused and non-sexually abused adolescents in the age group of 11 to 18 years were selected. Sexually abused adolescents included those adolescents who have been victims of any form of sexual abuse (Contact abuse includes oral, vaginal and anal penetration, touching, kissing and masturbation; Non-contact sexual abuse includes deliberate exposure of breasts or genitalia or witnessing a sexual act, either live or in films and photographs in print or electronic form). Non-sexually abused adolescents include those adolescents who have never witnessed sexual abuse in any form. The sample was selected from educational institutions (Schools and Colleges from the north and south districts of Goa). Data was also obtained by visiting Non-Governmental Organizations where sexual abuse cases are reported. The total sample used in the study was

392. Of them, 192 were sexually abused adolescents (78 Males, 114 Females) and 200 were sexually non-abused adolescents (100 Males, 100 Females), mean age was 15.

### 2.2 Tools

1. **Personal Data Sheet** – Personal data sheet was used to collect personal and socio-demographic information of the sample groups. It also included questions pertaining to sexual experiences.
2. **Deo-Mohan Achievement Motivation Scale (1985)** - The Deo-Mohan Achievement Motivation scale (DMAMS) by Pratibha Deo and Asha Mohan is used to study the level of achievement motivation of students. It has 50 items - 37 of which are positive and 13 are negative. For every statement, the possible responses are divided into five categories which are: always, frequently, sometimes, rarely and never. The various internal consistency reliability measure estimates varied from .80 to .83. As far as the validity of the scale is concerned, the coefficient of correlation between the scale and the projective test was observed to be .04.

### 2.3 Pilot Study

Prior to the final administration of the scales on the main sample under study, a pilot study was conducted to test the suitability of the four measures. It included a sample of 80 adolescents (40 sexually abused and 40 non-sexually abused adolescents). The participants had no difficulty in answering the tools administered. After finding the suitability of the measures on the sample group, the primary data was collected for the main research.

### 2.4 Statistical Techniques

After calculating the scores for each participant, the raw scores were converted into Standard (T) Score. The mean and standard deviation scores were calculated for the sub-groups separately. 't' analyses was carried out to determine the significance level of difference between the sample groups.

### 2.5 Procedure

Permission was obtained from various educational institutions (Schools, Higher Secondary Schools, and Colleges) and Non-

Governmental Organizations within the state of Goa. One of the researchers being a school/college counsellor came across a lot of students who report being sexually abused and hence, most of these students were requested for participation. The respondents were contacted personally, the purpose of the visit was made known to them, and their consent was sought for participation. After finding the suitability of the measures on the sample group through the pilot study, the data for the main study was collected from 392 adolescents (200 non-abused, 192 sexually abused). The participants were administered the Achievement Motivation Scale after assuring confidentiality and obtaining informed consent. Information relating to the respondents' personal and socio-demographic factors as well as information pertaining to sexual abuse was included in the personal data sheet and was collected along with the other data collection tools. Upon completion of the questionnaires, the participants were debriefed about the study and thanked for their participation in the study. The responses of the participants were then scored and subjected to statistical analysis.

### 3. RESULTS

To investigate whether there exist significant differences between sexually abused and non-

sexually abused adolescents with regard to their achievement motivation, independent sample t-test was applied.

As can be observed in Table 1, the mean scores for achievement motivation of sexually abused and non-sexually abused adolescents were calculated to be 102.35 (SD 17.10) and 136.43 (SD 16.67) respectively,  $t = 9.97$ ,  $P < 0.01$ , this implies that there exists significant differences in the achievement motivation level between sexually abused and non-sexually abused adolescents.

An observation of the Table 2 reveals that the mean scores for achievement motivation of sexually abused male and female adolescents were computed to be 116.33 (SD 23.25) and 102.65 (SD 15.22) respectively,  $t = 1.96$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . This indicates that there exists a significant difference in the level of achievement motivation with regard to gender.

Table 3 reveals that the mean scores for achievement motivation of non-sexually abused male and female adolescents were 139.50 (SD 14.35) and 135.18 (SD 17.04) respectively,  $t = 0.58$ , which is statistically non-significant. This implies that there exists no significant difference in the level of achievement motivation of non-sexually abused adolescents with regard to gender.

**Table 1. Mean, standard deviation, and t-value on achievement motivation of the sexually abused and non-sexually abused adolescents.**

Variable	Sample Groups	Mean	Standard Deviation	't' value
Achievement Motivation	Sexually Abused (n=192)	102.35	17.10	9.97**
	Sexually Non-abused (n=200)	136.43	16.67	

\*\*Significant at 0.01 level

**Table 2. Mean, standard deviation, and t-value on achievement motivation of sexually abused adolescents with regard to gender.**

Variables	Gender	Mean	Standard Deviation	't' value
Achievement Motivation	Males (n=78)	116.33	23.25	1.96*
	Females (n=114)	102.65	15.22	

\*Significant at 0.05 level

**Table 3. Mean, standard deviation, and t-value on achievement motivation of non-sexually abused adolescents with regard to gender.**

Variables	Gender	Mean	Standard Deviation	't' value
Achievement Motivation	Males (n=100)	139.50	14.35	0.58
	Females (n=100)	135.18	17.04	

#### 4. DISCUSSION

An analysis of the mean scores on achievement motivation of the sexually abused and non-sexually abused adolescents indicates that adolescents who experienced some form of sexual abuse have lower levels of achievement motivation as compared to adolescents who never experienced any form of sexual abuse. This could be probably because sexual abuse has deleterious effects on the victims and the impact is worse more so because the phase of life that these victims are in at the moment is in itself a very challenging phase. Experiencing traumatic events, such as sexual abuse often leads to serious changes in the psychological makeup of a person, particularly if a posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) develops. The traumatic sequel includes changes in different psychological states of the victim including that of motivation and a decreased need for achievement. Numerous studies have revealed a relationship between sexual abuse and depression or depressive symptoms [39,20, 40–43]. Depression can be a major contributor to a lack of motivation and depression was not measured in the present study, the present explanation is only a citation of a study which is related to our present study. For those who battle depression, the motivation factor can be an enemy that seems insurmountable at times. The depressed person may simply not feel like doing many of the things which used to give them pleasure and when depression is severe, the person may feel incapable to complete the tasks essential for daily living, thus making it incredibly difficult to work, to take care of themselves, and to live. Further substantiating this finding another study which revealed that depressed people suffer a motivational deficit since they often expect few rewards and many punishers, and the impact of rewards is low while that of punishers is high. They exhibit their most severe motivational deficits in ambiguous social situations [44]. Similar results were also obtained by other researchers [45,46].

Further, a person who has experienced the trauma of sexual assault will begin to see the world around them completely different to what it used to be. Their assumptions of safety and security may have been shattered and the victims may live in constant fear or future attacks. This will lead to a person isolating themselves and restricting things such as social activities and work. This reaction may be more profound when

the perpetrator is someone close and intimate to the victim such as a boyfriend/girlfriend or relative/family friend [47]. Also, in some cultures around the world, the victim of a sexual assault may be treated as the culprit, and that they bought it on themselves [48]. In cases like this, the victims are further traumatized as they are blamed, neglected or physically/mentally abused. This can happen anywhere in any culture, as many have experienced disbelief and victim blaming and shaming. Also, in some cultures, a victim of sexual assault especially the females are seen as 'damaged goods' and are made to feel that they have brought shame on their family [49]. The trauma associated with the abuse and the further self-blame and victimization by the society may have a negative impact on their need to achieve. All these factors can traumatize the victim all the more and which in turn may affect their need to achieve. This finding is further supported by other research studies [34,36].

An analysis of the mean scores on achievement motivation of sexually abused adolescents with regard to gender indicates that females who experienced sexual abuse have a slightly lower achievement motivation than males who experienced sexual abuse. A probable the present explanation is merely only to see the gender effect, but not to explain the effect of many demographic factors. Reason for this could be that though sexual abuse is detrimental for both males as well as females, females being the weaker and more vulnerable sex, are more affected by the trauma associated with sexual abuse. Previous research [50] has revealed that women are twice as likely to develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) than men after a sexual assault and women's PTSD tends to last longer than that of men. Also, another reason may be that guilt and shame are two emotions which a person may experience long-term after an assault. In some cases, a victim may feel that they are responsible for the attack due to things like if they were intoxicated or wearing an outfit they deemed provocative. Also as mentioned earlier, a victim of sexual assault especially the females may be seen as 'damaged goods' and are made to feel that they have brought shame on their family [49]. Victims of sexual abuse may thus perceive the world as being hostile and meaningless and the self as being damaged and worthless and all these factors may combine to decrease the level of achievement motivation of these ill-fated victims.

With regard to men who have experienced sexual abuse or assault, these have another set of difficulties to deal with; difficulties created by our society's expectations and assumptions of gender. Dealing with sexual abuse and assault often means dealing with a lot of ideas around 'being a man.' Many people do not take the sexual assault of men seriously, believing that men, especially men who identify as heterosexual or who are assaulted by women, cannot be victims of rape, male victims of sexual abuse and assault often face a culture that tells them their abuse results from either weakness or homosexuality and hence, some are reluctant to label their assault as rape or abuse or even mention it at all. Research suggests that men are less likely to access and receive support from family, friends, and specialized sexual assault services than women are [51]. Hence, taking these factors into consideration, men may find ways to cope with the emotions generated by the painful experience caused by the abuse and may return back to their normal living.

Analyzing the mean scores on achievement motivation of non-sexually abused adolescents with regard to gender, it is observed that males have scored a little higher than females. One of the important needs present to some degree in all human beings is the need for achievement or the need to attain the increasingly higher level of performance. In a competitive society or set up, the desire to excel over others or to achieve a higher level than one's peers is more intensified especially among adolescents which in turn may lead to a stronger drive or motive to achieve something or everything that is essential to beat others in the race and consequently experience a sense of pride and pleasure in the achievement. In the world of today, materialistic forces have an upper edge over and above the spiritual and other worldly notions which were the characteristics of the age before the upcoming of the new scientific era. Personal achievement is thought of as universal positive value and as such is stressed in the modern societies of the present age with achievement and need to achieve employed as standards for evaluating an individual in various aspects. Hence, since achievement and the need for achievement have such importance in the world today, there may be no gender differences in the levels of achievement motivation. Supporting the above finding are several studies which found no special tendency for women to score higher than men on affective responses in achievement motive questionnaire. Their results support the

view that gender differences in achievement motive are rooted in socialization processes rather than in basic differences between women and men [52-54].

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

It emerged from the present study that the sexually abused adolescents have significantly lower levels of achievement motivation than non-sexually abused adolescents. Also in the present study, a striking observation was that sexually abused females have lower levels of achievement motivation than sexually abused males. These findings thus imply that sexual abuse has a devastating impact on the victim's need for achievement. Further, with regard to non-sexually abused adolescents, no gender differences were observed in the levels of achievement motivation.

## CONSENT

All authors declare that written informed consent was obtained from the participants, their legal guardians, and concerned parties for publication of this paper.

## ETHICAL APPROVAL

All authors hereby declare that all experiments have been examined and approved by the appropriate ethics committee and have therefore been performed in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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