

REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-57259

Title: A Study on UPSC-CSE Aspirants and Their Conflicts in Clearing the Preliminary (Level 1) Phase of Examination.

Recommendation:

Accept as it is

Accept after minor revision.....

Accept after major revision

Do not accept (*Reasons below*)

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality			√	
Techn. Quality				√
Clarity		√		
Significance			√	

Reviewer's ID: JPR- 212

Detailed Reviewer's Report

Overall Assessment:

This manuscript addresses a relevant and under-researched topic: the psychological conflicts faced by UPSC Civil Services Examination aspirants, particularly during the Preliminary phase. The study highlights important issues including stress, financial pressure, family expectations, and fear of uncertainty. The findings, while preliminary, offer useful insights for coaching institutes, mental health professionals, and policymakers. However, the manuscript suffers from **significant methodological weaknesses** that severely limit the validity, generalizability, and scholarly contribution of the work. **Major revisions** are required, particularly regarding sampling, questionnaire design, data reporting, and theoretical integration.

Major Required Revisions:

- Sampling Method and Sample Size Are Inadequate:**
 - The study uses a **non-probability convenient sampling** technique with only **40 participants** from a single location (Rajendra Nagar). Given that over 10 lakh aspirants appear for the exam annually, this sample is neither representative nor sufficient for any meaningful generalization.
 - Action required:** Acknowledge this as a critical limitation in the abstract and conclusion. Revise claims such as "the findings reveal" to "the findings suggest tentatively." For future work, recommend a stratified random or quota sampling approach across multiple coaching hubs (e.g., Delhi, Hyderabad, Pune, Bengaluru).
- Questionnaire Is Not Validated or Described Sufficiently:**
 - The manuscript states that a "structured questionnaire consisting of 7 questions" was used, but there is no mention of:
 - Whether the questionnaire was pilot-tested.
 - Any reliability or validity measures (e.g., test-retest reliability, Cronbach's alpha).
 - The exact wording of each question (only response categories are shown in Table 1).
 - Whether questions were adapted from validated instruments or developed ad hoc.
 - Action required:** Provide the full questionnaire as an appendix. Report any pilot testing or expert review conducted. Acknowledge the lack of psychometric validation as a major limitation.
- Inappropriate Use of Causal and Interpretive Language:**
 - The manuscript states, "Stress has been identified as a major factor influencing academic performance" (line 67) and "financial stress has been shown to adversely affect academic performance" (line 70). However, the present study's design (descriptive survey, cross-sectional) cannot establish causation or even direction of influence.
 - Action required:** Replace causal language with correlational or descriptive phrasing. For example: "The data show an association between perceived stress and self-reported difficulty" rather than "stress influences performance."
- Statistical Analysis Is Too Simplistic for a Full Research Article:**
 - Only frequencies and percentages are reported. There are no tests of association (e.g., chi-square between gender and stress perception, or between field of study and fear of uncertainty), no confidence intervals, no effect sizes, and no subgroup comparisons despite collecting gender, age, and academic background data.
 - Action required:** Perform and report appropriate bivariate analyses. For example, compare stress levels between Arts vs. Science/Commerce students, or between age groups. If the sample size is too small for such tests, state this explicitly and treat the study as purely exploratory.
- Theoretical Framework Is Underutilized ("Token" Citation):**

International Journal of Advanced Research

Publisher's Name: Jana Publication and Research LLP

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- Max Weber's theory of rationality and social action is mentioned once (lines 54-57) but never integrated into the results, discussion, or conclusion. This appears as a superficial addition rather than a genuine analytical lens.
- **Action required:** Either remove the Weber reference entirely or meaningfully integrate it. For example, discuss how aspirants balance *zweckrational* (goal-oriented) preparation with *wertrational* (value-oriented) expectations of prestige and family approval, and how this tension creates the "conflicts" mentioned in the title.
- 6. **Results Section Is Redundant and Poorly Organized:**
 - Table 1, the interpretation paragraph, Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 4 contain overlapping information. For example, the finding that 87.5% perceive the exam as difficult is repeated three times.
 - **Action required:** Condense the results section. Present all quantitative findings in one or two well-organized tables, then summarize briefly in text. Figures should add unique value (e.g., comparisons or trends), not merely repeat tabular data.

Minor Revisions / Suggestions:

- 7. **Abstract Restructuring:**
 - The abstract currently combines introduction, methods, results, and conclusion without clear section labels. It also lacks numerical precision for key findings.
 - **Action required:** Restructure the abstract under standard headings: **Background, Aim, Methods, Results, Conclusion**. Include the exact percentage for fear of future uncertainty (67.5%) and the preference for Plan B (77.5%) in the results section.
- 8. **Missing Key Variables and Ethical Statement:**
 - No information is provided about:
 - Number of previous attempts by aspirants.
 - Whether participants were currently enrolled in coaching or self-studying.
 - Whether they had cleared Prelims previously.
 - Informed consent procedure or ethical approval (institutional review board).
 - **Action required:** Add an "Ethical Considerations" subsection in Methods, stating that informed consent was obtained, anonymity was maintained, and any relevant IRB approval was secured.
- 9. **References Are Inconsistent and Partially Irrelevant:**
 - Several references are generic (e.g., Deb et al. on high school students, Agarwal & Singh on financial stress in general students) and not specific to UPSC or competitive exam aspirants.
 - References 8 and 9 on COVID-19 are completely irrelevant to this study, as no COVID-related data were collected.
 - Reference formatting is inconsistent (some with issue numbers, some without; some with page ranges, some without).
 - **Action required:** Remove irrelevant references. Add more specific literature on UPSC aspirants if available, or on competitive exam psychology in the Indian context. Standardize all references to a single format (e.g., APA 7th).
- 10. **Figures Lack Professional Quality:**
 - Figures are presented as simple bar charts (apparently hand-drawn or basic Excel). Figure 4's legend is unclear ("Yes, with minimum stress" vs. "No, without minimum stress" is confusing).
 - **Action required:** Redesign all figures with clear titles, labeled axes, consistent color schemes, and unambiguous legends. Consider presenting the GS vs. CSAT comparison as a grouped bar chart.
- 11. **Writing and Grammar Issues:**
 - Line 51: "the examination process is rigorous and consists of multiple stages" – repetitive.
 - Line 73: "stress has been identified as a major factor" – passive voice overused.
 - Line 99: Table 1 formatting is broken and difficult to read.
 - Line 187: "a significant proportion believed" – what proportion? (60%, but this should be restated).
 - **Action required:** Proofread carefully for conciseness, active voice, and clarity. Reformat Table 1 as a proper grid.

Recommendation Justification:

This manuscript addresses a timely and important topic with clear practical relevance. The findings, particularly regarding financial pressure (42.5%), fear of future uncertainty (67.5%), and preference for Plan B (77.5%), offer valuable preliminary insights. However, the study in its current form is **methodologically weak** due to: (1) a convenience sample of only 40 participants from a single location, (2) an unvalidated 7-item questionnaire, (3) lack of any inferential statistical analysis, (4) misuse of causal language, and (5) superficial engagement with the stated theoretical framework (Weber). These issues place the manuscript below the threshold for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. **Major revisions**—including sample expansion or explicit acknowledgment of limitations, questionnaire validation or detailed description, appropriate statistical analysis, and meaningful theoretical integration—are essential. If these revisions cannot be made, the manuscript may be more suitable as a short research note or conference proceeding rather than a full research article.