

International Journal of Advanced Research

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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 after minor revision

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality		✓,		
Techn. Quality		✓,		
Clarity	✓,			
Significance	✓,			

Reviewer Name: Abdul Haseeb Mir

Detailed Reviewer's Report

The research article titled "A Study on UPSC-CSE Aspirants and Their Conflicts in Clearing the Preliminary (Level 1) Phase of Examination" offers a poignant psychological and sociological inquiry into the lives of students pursuing one of the world's most demanding competitive hurdles. The author establishes that the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) Civil Services Examination is more than just an academic test; it is a high-stakes arena where thousands of aspirants grapple with intense pressure, uncertainty, and internal conflict. By focusing on the Preliminary phase—the initial screening stage—the paper explores the unique stressors that characterize the preparation landscape, particularly in academic hubs like Rajendra Nagar. The study successfully argues that the path to the Indian bureaucracy is often marked by a "crisis of confidence" driven by the widening gap between the immense effort invested and the statistical improbability of success.

The narrative begins by framing the Preliminary exam as a psychological barrier that serves as the first point of attrition for nearly a million candidates annually. The author expertly evaluates the nature of this "screening" phase, noting that the unpredictable nature of the questions and the negative marking system create a high-anxiety environment. A significant strength of this section is the identification of "Conflict" as the primary psychological state of the aspirant. This conflict is presented as a multi-dimensional struggle: the desire for social prestige versus the fear of public failure, and the intellectual drive to master vast subjects versus the practical exhaustion of long-term isolation. The author handled this framing with sensitivity, acknowledging that for many, the UPSC is not just a career choice but a defining identity.

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A primary focus of the research involves the empirical analysis of data collected from a sample of 40 aspirants. The author evaluates the sources of pressure, revealing a complex hierarchy of stressors. While internal motivation is often the starting point, the study finds that external factors—specifically family expectations and the financial burden of prolonged preparation—eventually become the dominant sources of conflict. The findings suggest that a significant majority of aspirants in the 20-25 age group experience peak stress, as this period often coincides with the societal pressure to achieve "settlement." The author notes that the environment of "coaching hubs" often exacerbates these conflicts by creating a bubble of constant comparison, where every peer is seen as a competitor and every failure is magnified.

The discussion then moves to the role of "Plan B" or alternative career paths in mitigating psychological conflict. The author evaluates whether having a backup plan reduces the pressure to clear the exam or if it acts as a distraction that weakens one's resolve. The study reveals a fascinating tension: while many acknowledge the importance of a Plan B for long-term security, the fear that it might lead to "diluted focus" prevents many from actively pursuing one. This "all-or-nothing" mentality is presented as a major contributor to the severity of the psychological impact when a candidate fails the Preliminary stage. The narrative effectively argues that the lack of a structured transition for unsuccessful candidates is a systemic gap that leaves many young professionals in a state of "limbo" for several years.

Furthermore, the paper addresses the physical and mental health consequences of this prolonged conflict. The author explores the prevalence of sleep disturbances, anxiety, and social withdrawal among the surveyed group. The study highlights that the "fear of the unknown" regarding the exam pattern is a constant background noise that prevents genuine relaxation. The author's evaluation of "preparation fatigue" suggests that after a certain point, more study hours do not correlate with better performance but rather with increased burnout. The narrative calls for a more holistic approach to aspirant welfare, suggesting that mental health support and realistic career counseling should be integrated into the ecosystem of UPSC preparation to protect the demographic dividend of the nation.

In summary, this article offers a robust and data-driven inquiry into the human cost of academic excellence in a competitive society. It successfully bridges the gap between statistical success rates and the lived reality of those behind the numbers. The author's ability to link the structural difficulty of the examination with the specific psychological conflicts of the youth makes this a significant contribution to the fields of educational psychology and Indian sociology. It is an essential read for educators, family members of aspirants, and the candidates themselves, providing a mirror to their struggles and a reminder that resilience is as much about mental well-being as it is about knowledge.

Recommendations

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- The author should consider expanding the sample size in future studies to include aspirants from diverse geographical and socio-economic backgrounds, particularly those preparing in rural settings without access to specialized coaching hubs, to compare their conflict profiles with urban aspirants.
- To improve the academic depth of the psychological section, it is recommended that the author utilize a standardized stress scale, such as the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), to provide a more rigorous quantitative baseline for the reported levels of anxiety and fear.
- The paper would benefit from a dedicated section on "Gendered Conflicts," exploring how female aspirants might face unique pressures regarding marriage timelines or safety concerns in preparation hubs that differ from those of their male counterparts.
- It is suggested that the author include a visual "Decision Matrix" for Plan B development, illustrating how aspirants can align their UPSC subjects with alternative professional qualifications to reduce the existential dread of failure.
- Future research should involve a longitudinal component, tracking the same group of 40 aspirants over multiple attempts to observe how "conflict" evolves from the first attempt to the final one, and how the "fear of failure" changes as the candidate nears the age limit.

Recommendation: Recommend for publication with minor revision.