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Article

Assessing Human Rights Awareness Among University Students: A Quantitative Study

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Abstract:

Human rights, the fundamental freedoms and entitlements inherent to all individuals, have evolved over millennia, shaped by philosophical, religious, and legal traditions. Human rights are those minimal rights that individuals need to have against the state or public authority by virtue of their being members of the human family, irrespective of any other consideration. This study investigates the level of human rights awareness among undergraduate students at Jamia Millia Islamia University, Delhi, with particular attention to variations across gender, academic stream, and locality. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from 150 students through the Human Rights Awareness Test (HRAT), a standardised tool developed by V. Sood and A. Anand. The results indicate that students, on average, demonstrated a moderate level of human rights awareness (M = 71.92, SD = 16.18). Gender-based analysis revealed a statistically significant difference, with male students scoring higher than female students. However, differences based on locality (rural vs. urban) and academic stream (science, commerce, and social science) were not statistically significant. These findings suggest that while students possess foundational awareness, there remains room for improvement, particularly in addressing gender disparities and integrating human rights education across all disciplines. The study highlights the importance of embedding human rights education more uniformly across university curricula and fostering inclusive learning environments that empower all students, regardless of background.

Keywords: Human Rights Awareness, Undergraduate Students, Gender Differences, Academic Stream, Locality, Quantitative Research, HRAT

1. INTRODUCTION

Human rights "those minimal rights that individuals need to have against the State or any public authority by virtue of their being members of the human family" (Pagels, 1979) have travelled a long historical arc from ancient moral precepts to modern instruments of international law. Although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 proclaimed that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights", persistent violations remind us that those entitlements must be continually taught, defended and realised. Universities are uniquely positioned for that task. As spaces where future leaders acquire knowledge and civic values, they can transform abstract principles into lived practice (Tibbitts, 2002; Bajaj, 2011). Yet empirical evidence from a range of national contexts suggests that many undergraduates possess only fragmentary or superficial understandings of human-rights norms, instruments and enforcement mechanisms (Çayır, 2016; Ojo, 2018). Against this backdrop, the present study probes the level of human-rights awareness among undergraduate students in South-East Delhi and interrogates the sociocultural factors that shape their knowledge.

Defining human rights is notoriously difficult because conceptions vary with "differences in cultural background, legal systems and ideology" (Oxford University Press, 2009). Nevertheless, scholars converge on several core attributes: universality, inalienability and indivisibility (Vasak, 1979; Amnesty International, 2024). First-generation rights

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protect civil and political liberty, second-generation rights secure socio-economic welfare, and emerging third-generation rights safeguard collective interests such as development and a healthy environment. For the purposes of this study, human-rights awareness is operationally defined as students' knowledge of (a) foundational concepts (dignity, universality, non-discrimination), (b) major treaties (UDHR, ICCPR, ICESCR) and (c) institutional remedies at national and international levels.

Human-rights education (HRE) empowers individuals "to know and claim their rights and to respect the rights of others" (United Nations, 2011). At university level it should move beyond doctrinal exposure toward experiential learning—moot courts, service-learning projects and campus advocacy—that enables students to connect normative content with concrete injustices (Flowers, 2015; Struthers, 2016). Nevertheless, integration of HRE into tertiary curricula remains uneven. In India, courses on constitutional law expose students to fundamental rights, yet elective status and content overload often limit deep engagement (Baxi, 2012). Internationally, curricular coverage correlates with institutional mission, faculty expertise and resource availability (Altbach, 2015). These disparities underscore the need for context-specific diagnostics such as the present research.

Quantitative studies in diverse settings report moderate to low awareness scores among undergraduates. In Turkey, for example, students recognised the idea of equality but were unfamiliar with complaint procedures before the European Court of Human Rights (Çayır, 2016). Nigerian undergraduates displayed similar patterns, scoring higher on civil liberties than on socio-economic rights (Ojo, 2018). South Asian research is scarcer, but anecdotal evidence points to gender, locality and disciplinary stream as salient variables. Female students sometimes exhibit greater sensitivity to rights discourse, possibly due to personal experience with gender discrimination (Nussbaum, 2000). Rural-urban divides may reflect differential access to digital resources and civil-society networks (McEvoy-Levy, 2014). Disciplinary differences can arise because social-science curricula routinely address normative frameworks, whereas natural-science programs emphasise technical skills (Meyer, 2010).

Delhi's universities enrol a socio-economically diverse cohort drawn from across India. Understanding how these students perceive human rights is critical for at least three reasons. First, awareness is a precursor to rights-claiming behaviour (Bajaj, 2011). Second, universities can use diagnostic evidence to redesign syllabi, co-curricular initiatives and community-engagement projects. Third, India's National Education Policy 2020 calls for the cultivation of "constitutional values," making baseline data indispensable for monitoring progress. Consequently, this study addresses an empirical gap while offering actionable insights for educators and policy-makers.

This study seeks to investigate the overall level of human-rights awareness among undergraduate students in South-East Delhi and explore how this awareness varies across different demographic and academic variables. The first research question (RQ1) aims to assess the general level of awareness regarding human rights among students in this region, providing a baseline understanding of how informed they are about fundamental human rights principles. The second research question (RQ2) examines whether there are differences in the level of human-rights awareness based on gender, comparing male and female students to identify any disparities. The third question (RQ3) focuses on the academic background of students, exploring whether students from different academic streams—science, social science, and commerce—exhibit varying levels of awareness about human rights. Lastly, the fourth research question (RQ4) investigates whether the students' place of origin, specifically rural versus urban backgrounds, plays a role in shaping their awareness of human rights. Together, these questions aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing human-rights awareness among undergraduate students in South-East Delhi.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To measure the overall level of human rights awareness among university students.
2. To compare awareness levels between male and female students.
3. To compare awareness levels between rural and urban students.
4. To examine disciplinary variations in awareness across science, social-science and commerce streams.

3. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

- There is a significant difference in human-rights awareness between male and female students.
- There is a significant difference in human-rights awareness between rural and urban students.
- There are significant differences in human-rights awareness across academic streams (science, social science, and commerce).

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Population

The population for this study comprised undergraduate students enrolled at Jamia Millia Islamia University in Delhi. The university serves a diverse group of students, offering a range of academic programmes and drawing students from various geographical, socio-economic, and cultural backgrounds, making it an appropriate setting for exploring human rights awareness across different demographic groups.

4.2. Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample of 150 undergraduate students was selected for this study using a convenience sampling method. This sampling technique was chosen to ensure practicality and feasibility in data collection, given the constraints of time and resources. The sample was designed to be diverse,

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ensuring representation across key demographic variables such as gender (male, female), academic background (science, social science, commerce), and regional origin (rural/urban), allowing for meaningful comparisons of human rights awareness levels across different subgroups.

4.3. Research Instrument

The main tool used for data collection in this study was the **Human Rights Awareness Test (HRAT)**, a copyrighted instrument developed by **V. Sood and A. Anand**. The HRAT is designed to measure students' knowledge and understanding of human rights concepts. It consists of **50 items**, divided equally between **25 positively worded** and **25 negatively worded** statements. These items address knowledge of key human rights documents (such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), fundamental concepts, and practical applications of human rights.

Participants were asked to respond using a **three-point scale**: **True**, **Undecided**, or **False**. The scoring system assigned values based on the orientation of the statements:

- For **positive statements**, a score of 2 was awarded for "True" and 0 for "False".
- For **negative statements**, a score of 2 was awarded for "False" and 0 for "True".

The total possible score ranged from **0 to 100**, with higher scores indicating greater awareness of human rights. This instrument was chosen because of its established validity and reliability.

4.4. Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was carried out in a controlled environment to minimise external variables and ensure consistency across all participants. Before beginning, all participants were provided with informed consent and clear instructions on how to complete the HRAT. The test was administered individually, with each participant taking approximately 15–20 minutes to complete it. The controlled setting ensured that all participants had an equal opportunity to complete the test without distractions.

4.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were calculated to determine the central tendency and variability of human rights awareness scores. To assess differences in awareness levels across various subgroups (e.g., gender, academic stream, rural/urban origin), inferential statistics were used, including independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA. These tests allowed for the comparison of means between different categories to identify any statistically significant differences in human rights awareness. Hypotheses were tested at a significance level of 0.05.

4.6. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. The anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were maintained, and all data were used solely for the purpose of this research.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The analysis is done based on the objective of the study.

5.1. O1: Overall Human Rights Awareness

The first objective was to determine the general level of human rights awareness among students.

Table 1: *Overall Descriptive Statistics*

N	Mean	SD
150	71.92	16.18

The mean score of 71.92 suggests an average level of human rights awareness, aligning with a z-score of +0.15 (Grade D) based on standardised norms. While the score indicates an acceptable level of awareness, the standard deviation of 16.18 highlights substantial variability, with some students scoring below 60 and others approaching 90. This range suggests disparities in exposure, education, or socio-cultural influences.

5.2. O2: Gender-Based Differences in Awareness

The second objective involved evaluating gender-based disparities in awareness. An independent samples t-test compared the mean scores of male and female students.

Table 2: *Comparison of mean scores between female and male participants. Independent samples t-test results indicate a significant difference in scores (p = 0.02), with females scoring lower on average than males.*

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	df	*p*-value	$\bar{X} - \bar{X}$
Female	75	68.91	13.85	-2.31	148	0.02*	-6.02
Male	75	74.93	17.81				

The mean score of the female students was lower (M = 68.91, SD = 13.85) compared to male students (M = 74.93, SD = 17.81). The mean score of both male and female students suggests the average level of human rights awareness as per tables 3.3 and 3.2. The mean difference of -6.02 indicates males scored approximately 6 points higher on average. The results of the inferential statistics provide further insight into the observed gender difference in scores. A t-test revealed that the difference between female and male students was statistically significant, with $t(148) = -2.31$ and $p = 0.02$, indicating that the observed difference is unlikely due to chance ($p < 0.05$). The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranged from -11.17 to -8.79, which does not include zero, further reinforcing the statistical significance of the result.

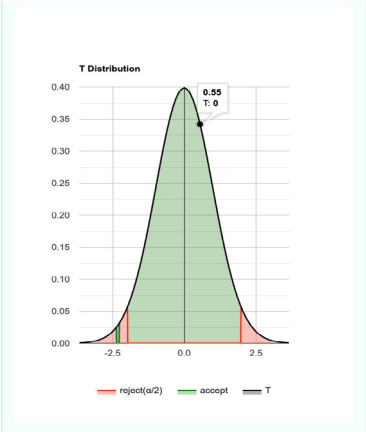


Figure 4.2: *t-Value gender lies in the NPC*

5.3. O3: Locality-Based Differences in Awareness

The third objective was to assess whether locality (rural vs. urban) affected awareness levels.

Table 3: *Comparison of mean scores between urban and rural participants. Independent samples t-test results indicate a significant difference in scores (p = 0.21), with rural scoring lower on average than urban.*

Locality	N	$\bar{X}$	*SD*	*t*	*Df*	*p*-Value	$\bar{X}$ - $\bar{X}$
Rural	69	70.13	14.26	-1.25	148	0.21	-3.31
Urban	81	73.44	17.60				

The mean score of the students who belong to rural areas was slightly lower (M = 70.13, SD = 14.26) compared to students who belong to urban areas (M = 73.44, SD = 17.60). The mean difference of -3.31 indicates that urban students scored about three points higher on average. The inferential analysis comparing HRAT scores between rural and urban students revealed that the observed difference was not statistically significant. The independent samples t-test yielded $t(148) = -1.25$ with a p-value of 0.21, which exceeds the conventional threshold for significance ($p > 0.05$). The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranged from -8.54 to +1.91 and included zero, indicating that the observed difference could plausibly be attributed to random sampling variability rather than a true effect.

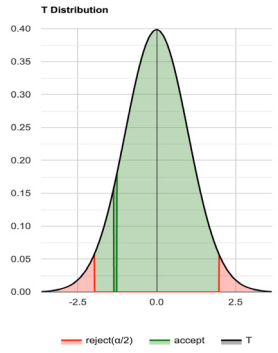


Figure 4.4: *t-Value of locality lies in the NPC*

5.4. O4: Academic Stream-Based Differences in Awareness

The fourth objective explored variations in awareness across academic disciplines. A one-way ANOVA was used to compare scores across science, commerce, and social science students.

Table 4: *Descriptive statistics for mean scores by academic stream*

Stream	N	Mean	SD
Science	43	69.42	14.17
Commerce	57	71.89	15.76
Social Sci.	50	74.10	18.17

Table 5: *ANOVA results comparing the mean scores across academic streams*

Source	SS	df	MS	$\mathcal{F}$	*p*-value
Between	506.71	2	253.35	0.97	0.38
Within	38,510.33	147	261.98		
Total	39,017.04	149			

The descriptive and inferential statistics comparing HRAT scores across academic streams—Social Science, Commerce, and Science—revealed only minor differences in mean scores. Social Science students had the highest average score (M = 74.10, SD = 18.17), followed by Commerce students (M = 71.89, SD = 15.76) and Science students (M = 69.42, SD = 14.17). The one-way ANOVA conducted to test for differences between academic streams yielded an F-statistic of $F(2, 147) = 0.97$ with a p-value of 0.38, indicating that the differences in mean scores are not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). Additionally, the effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.013$) was very small, implying that academic stream accounts for just 1.3% of the variance in HRAT scores—an effect that is negligible in practical terms. This interpretation is further supported by the variance breakdown: within-group variability ($SS_{(Within)} = 38,510.33$) was much greater than between-group variability ($SS_{(Between)} = 506.71$). This finding underscores that differences in human rights awareness are more pronounced within each academic stream than between them, highlighting the limited explanatory power of academic discipline in accounting for variations in HRAT scores.

6. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to assess human rights awareness among students, examining potential differences based on gender, locality, and academic stream. The findings provide valuable insights into the general level of human rights awareness and highlight significant areas for further exploration and action. The results, however, also indicate complexities and disparities that warrant closer scrutiny.

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6.1. Overall Human Rights Awareness

The mean score of 71.92 suggests that students, on average, exhibit a moderate level of human rights awareness. While this suggests an acceptable understanding, the standard deviation (SD = 16.18) indicates notable variability in the responses. This wide spread implies that some students are highly aware, while others show limited knowledge or understanding of human rights concepts. This variability could be attributed to differing educational backgrounds, social influences, or exposure to human rights education. The presence of a significant range of scores calls for tailored educational approaches that address these disparities, ensuring all students acquire a foundational knowledge of human rights.

The z-score of +0.15 places the overall mean in a "Grade D" category, which might suggest room for improvement in fostering a deeper understanding of human rights among students. The variability observed may also reflect the effectiveness or inconsistencies of existing human rights education programs, which may vary by institution, geographic location, or cultural context.

6.2. Gender-Based Differences

A key finding of this study was the statistically significant difference in human rights awareness between male and female students, with males scoring higher on average. The results of the independent samples t-test ($t(148) = -2.31$, $p = 0.02$) indicate that gender influences awareness, with female students scoring significantly lower than their male counterparts by an average of 6.02 points. The confidence interval for this difference, which ranges from -11.17 to -8.79, provides further evidence of the robustness of this disparity.

While it is clear that gender plays a role in shaping human rights awareness, it is important to consider the underlying factors that may contribute to this discrepancy. Cultural, societal, and educational factors may influence how male and female students engage with human rights topics. It is possible that societal gender roles or the way human rights topics are introduced in educational settings may impact male and female students differently. Future research should delve deeper into the socio-cultural factors that drive these differences and explore interventions that can help bridge the awareness gap between genders.

6.3. Locality-Based Differences

When evaluating the impact of locality on human rights awareness, the results showed that students from urban areas scored slightly higher ($M = 73.44$) than those from rural areas ($M = 70.13$). However, this difference was not statistically significant ($t(148) = -1.25$, $p = 0.21$), suggesting that locality (urban vs. rural) may not have a strong influence on students' human rights awareness.

This finding contrasts with the expectation that students from urban areas might have more exposure to human rights education, given the typically greater availability of resources and educational opportunities in urban settings. However, the lack of statistical significance implies that other factors, such as the quality and type of human rights education in both rural and urban schools, may be more influential than the mere geographical location. Rural students may still receive valuable exposure to human rights issues through alternative channels, such as community-based organizations or media. It would be valuable to investigate how different regions deliver human rights education and whether disparities in educational infrastructure contribute to the observed differences.

6.4. Academic Stream-Based Differences

The analysis of human rights awareness across academic streams (Science, Commerce, and Social Science) revealed only minor differences in scores, with Social Science students having the highest average awareness ($M = 74.10$) and Science students the lowest ($M = 69.42$). The one-way ANOVA ($F(2, 147) = 0.97$, $p = 0.38$) confirmed that these differences were not statistically significant. This suggests that academic discipline, whether a student is in Science, Commerce, or Social Science, does not substantially affect their awareness of human rights.

The minimal impact of academic stream on human rights awareness is noteworthy. It suggests that human rights education may be more dependent on factors other than the chosen academic discipline. However, it is also possible that the content and emphasis on human rights within each academic stream are not substantial enough to foster large differences. This may imply that human rights education should be integrated more thoroughly across all academic disciplines, ensuring that students, regardless of their specialization, gain a solid understanding of these fundamental concepts.

7. CONCLUSION

This study provides important insights into human rights awareness among students and highlights several key findings that merit further exploration.

1. **Overall Human Rights Awareness**: While the general level of awareness is acceptable, there is considerable variability among students, indicating a need for more consistent and comprehensive human rights education.

2. **Gender-Based Differences**: A significant gender gap was found, with male students scoring higher than female students. This disparity underscores the need for targeted interventions that address gender-related differences in human rights education.

3. **Locality-Based Differences**: The lack of significant differences between urban and rural students suggests that factors other than geographic location may play a more crucial role in determining human rights awareness. Further research into educational practices in these areas could provide valuable insights.

4. **Academic Stream-Based Differences**: No significant differences in awareness were found between students of different academic streams, indicating that human rights education should be equally emphasized across all disciplines to ensure a well-rounded understanding

among all students.

The study's findings suggest that while human rights awareness is generally moderate, there are disparities that can be attributed to factors such as gender. To foster a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of human rights, educational institutions must prioritize targeted, equitable interventions. Future research should explore how curriculum design, socio-cultural factors, and gender-specific issues influence human rights education.

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Single author work.

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Competing Interests

The author declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this research.

Clinical Trial Registration (if applicable)

Not Applicable

Human Ethics and Consent to Participate

The study did not involve any clinical interventions or experiments requiring formal ethical approval.

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