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RESEARCH ARTICLE

SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF PREJUDICES: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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Abstract

“Thescientificstudyofmindandbehavior”iscalledPsychology.Itcovershum anandnon-human behavior, both conscious (aware) and unconscious (unaware) phenomena, as well as mental processes like thoughts, feelings, and motives. Social psychology (branch of psychology) is the scientific study of how others' actual, imagined, or assumed presence influences individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. In context of social psychology-Prejudice is an assumption or opinion made about someone based solely on their belongingness to a specific group. Three psychological aspects of Prejudices– cognitive, affective or emotional, and behavioural. (Sage Knowledge, 2010)

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Introduction:-

Prejudice is derived from the Latin words *prejudicium* which means (injustice) and *praeiudicium* (prior judgment), it referred to judicial assessment before the trial. The most frequently accepted definition of prejudice is a negative attitude toward a specific social group and its members. People may hold prejudices toward others of a different ethnicity, gender, or religion or simply; prejudice is a pre-judgement about someone without completely knowing them. The psychological roots of prejudices include people's basic beliefs, how they perceive themselves and others, their sense of social identity, and the social rules that determine who is included or excluded from social groupings. (Equality and Human Rights Commission Research report 56, 2010)

For instance, someone may allow their preconceived notions about someone who is Christian, Muslim, or Jewish to influence how they perceive and interact with them. Asian, White, or Black persons may experience the same things. Typical characteristics of prejudices include:

1. negative feelings
2. preconceived stereotypes
3. a propensity to treat group members unfairly

Prejudices against certain groups in society are frequently based on race, gender, religion, culture, and other factors. While particular definitions of prejudice presented by social scientists typically differ, most agree that it involves biases that are usually negative against members of a group. (Gould, W.R., 2022, November 8).

Common types of prejudice: As previously said, prejudiced attitudes can be based on a variety of characteristics, including gender, race, age, sexual orientation, nationality, income, and religion. Some of the most common types of prejudice include the following:

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Racism:

The notion that some races are superior than others; Unfair treatment of persons of different races (Oxford Languages, n.d.)

Ageism:

Prejudice or discrimination directed at people based on their age. It is most commonly associated with the aged people, but it can also victimize youth

Sexism:

Prejudice or discrimination based on sex, particularly against women, can lead to stereotyping of social roles. (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)

Nationalism:

The prejudice of addressing one's country superior to others. (Guimarães, S. P.; 2008, April 1)

Classism:

Prejudice against people from a certain social class. (Oxford Languages, n.d.)

Religious prejudice:

People of different religious groups have unfavourable attitudes or conduct because of their differing religious views. (Encyclopedia.com, 8 Jan. 2024)

Homophobia:

Dislike against the LGBTQ community. (Oxford Languages, n.d.)

Xenophobia:

Fear or hostility of foreign citizens and traditions. (Oxford Languages, n.d.)

Prejudice and discrimination are not the same. Prejudice refers to attitudes and ideologies in general, whereas discrimination describes the acts that can result from prejudice.

Why There Is Prejudice?:

The truth is that a variety of factors contribute to prejudice, and there is no one clear explanation for it. Gordon Allport, a psychologist, asserts that prejudice and stereotypes are mainly products of ordinary human thought. Information must be categorized mentally in order for us to make sense of the world around us. According to Allport's explanation in his book: **The Nature of Prejudice**, "the human mind must think with the aid of categories." "Once established, categories serve as the foundation for typical prejudice. This is a process we cannot possibly avoid; orderly living is dependent on it." (Gould, W.R., 2022, November 8).

Put another way, humans frequently rely on our capacity to categorize persons, concepts, and things in order to simplify the understanding of the world around us. Simply put, there is simply too much information available to us to sort through it all in a rational, methodical, and logical way. Sadly, this hasty classification results in invalid assumptions that affect both people and the globe at large. (Gould, W.R., 2022, November 8).

Aspects of Psychology in Prejudice: As we know, psychology is the scientific study of mind and behaviour, in case of thinking and behaviour of human being with respect to interaction with others and the surroundings; branch of psychology known as "Social psychology" comes into play. Social psychology basically studies how people interact with others in their surroundings, how other factors influence them while interacting and in building social relationships; these can be psychological factors (self-esteem, positive or negative self-image, or anxiety, calm minded, beliefs, mental health etc.), Biological factors (genetics, age, physical health, sleep cycle, etc.) social factors (interpersonal relationships, family, work environment, culture etc.). Social psychology basically covers these three factors while studying human behaviour and interactions.

As we know, prejudices are basically pre-judgements about others without fully knowing them, on basis of their region, sex, age, nationality, class, caste etc, which basically lead to negative feelings and attitude towards others and further it will lead to discriminatory behaviour for others. Here we will discuss about psychological aspects of prejudices and how they affect perception of individual and their behaviour towards others. Three psychological aspects of Prejudices – **cognitive, affective or emotional, and behavioural.**

Cognitive aspect:

Cognitive prejudice reflects itself through views and beliefs about the personal characteristics of a group of people. Behavioural prejudice manifests itself in hostile behaviour against the outgroup (Farley, 2005). Emotion and cognition also contribute to prejudice through the development of schemas. A schema is an organizing pattern of thought that is used to categorize and interpret information, thus shaping individual attitudes and perspectives. (Jack Westin; 2020, July 16)

For example: Consider a person working in office; you probably immediately think of a man, sitting in front of computer in an office setting; this image is based on our schemas; that is usually we have seen in our childhood stories that males are working outside and females look after household chores; and in general, we are seeing this in our society from childhood that developed certain beliefs and sometimes stereotypes that further can lead to prejudices;

We can take one more common example from the era when women started working outside after marriage, people started making prejudices or judgment about them and their husbands, (like: who will see the household chores, or the man is not able to earn enough to fulfil basic needs of his wife, that now she is working to earn), we can still see this in some parts of our societies; these all judgments are result of previous experiences of people from patriarchal society, and the beliefs that have developed in their minds from these experiences (schemas).

As in essence, schemas are created from our memories of personal experiences. Simply expressed, a schema represents the patterns of thought and behaviour that humans implement to analyse the world. We utilize schemas to take shortcuts when analysing the large amount of information available in our surroundings. The good part is that schemas can be modified as we learn new information but it requires a flexibility in an individual's attitude to learn and accept new updates with time, otherwise it will lead to stereotypes, which will further lead to prejudices and as a result there will be some biasness in behaviour of people towards others.

What is cognition in psychology?

Cognition refers to the mental processes that occur in the brain, including thinking, attention, language, learning, memory, and perception. These processes are not distinct abilities; rather, they are a collection of diverse, interconnected capabilities that allow us to operate as healthy adults. (DPUK; n.d.)

Three cognitive processes—categorization, assimilation, and search for conceptual coherence—were examined in light of their potential to contribute to the development of prejudice in an individual.

Categorization:

In psychology, categorization refers to how we divide items into groups, known as cognitive categories, to help us organize information. For example, we can quickly identify a cat and a dog, both of which are classified as "animals." Both have four legs, a tail, and are furry.

Stereotyping and prejudice stem from social categorization, a normal cognitive process in which we assign individuals to social categories. Social categorization affects how we see groups, such as **outgroup homogeneity** (the inclination to believe that members of other groups are remarkably similar to one another, especially when contrasted with the assumed variety of one's own group)

Assimilation:

Assimilation is the process by which a minority becomes socially, culturally, and/or politically integrated into a larger, dominant culture and society. Assimilation is a phrase commonly used to describe immigrants and ethnic groups settling in a new place. As a result of prejudices of larger ethnic groups towards smaller ethnic groups, which lead to negative attitudes for smaller groups or new groups and can result in unjustifiable behaviour of larger ethnic groups towards these small or new groups and it becomes harder for them to recognize themselves as a member of larger ethnic groups.

Search for conceptual coherence:

Traditionally, the idea of similarity—that is, the idea that things, events, or creatures constitute a concept because they are similar to one another—has been linked to conceptual coherence, which is defined as concepts of which the contents make sense to the perceiver. When concepts of contents do not make sense to the perceiver or when new things do not match with their previous concepts, they tend to prejudice other groups of people and further it will lead to negative attitude and

feelings which results indiscriminatory behaviour for other people, cultures, races, classes etc. for example: Prejudices of some groups of people towards other cultures or traditions as their things do not coherent with their concepts of culture or traditions.

Affective or Emotional aspect:

What people like and dislike is referred to as affective prejudice. Prejudice has an emotional component to it. (Rouse, L. et. al, 1970, January 1). The affective component of prejudice refers to prejudiced people's negative emotions in the presence of disliked groups. Most individuals focus on the affective or emotional aspect of prejudice. (dbu.edu, n.d.) Emotions are always a part of prejudice. It either supports or opposes a certain community, or group. If favourable, the individual would be overly loving, caring, sympathetic, and affectionate toward others in a different group. But, if the outcome was negative, the person would exhibit dislike, and hatred. The emotional component of prejudice explains why implicit prejudices are resistant to change, which appears to be an unbreakable cycle of prejudice. (Exposé Magazine, n.d.)

For example: People have a less warmth and competency of groups like the people who always show attitude and never except their flaws and always give excuses, or people rigid to adapt with new situations or changes; which makes them feel disgust. On the other hand, people place a high value on warmth but low on competence in the people flexible to adapt with new situations or changes, old people, the physically challenged, and intellectually challenged, which makes them feel sorry for them.

Behavioural or conative aspect:

Conative prejudice is the term used to describe how people tend to act and how discrimination can be used to monitor them by others (Rouse, L. et. al, 1970, January 1). Conative Prejudice refers to how people tend to behave. People do not act on their feelings; therefore, this remains an attitude. Conative Prejudice can be seen in the phrase "If I was principle, I would rusticate these types of students who continuously annoy teachers".

But sometimes prejudice can lead to negative feelings on which people act or react therefore prejudice frequently leads to discriminatory behaviour, which is the unfair treatment of members of a stigmatized group based simply on their membership in that group. For example: Some people have negative attitude towards daily labour workers and that reflects in their behaviour when they are dealing with them, like: some people talk with labourers in a very bad tone and behave with them rudely.

The three forms of prejudice are correlated and so intricately interconnected that identifying one would be impossible without understanding the other.

Conclusion:-

While prejudice can happen without our awareness. Whether deeply rooted, taught, or an implicit bias, it is critical to combat our own prejudices against others. Understanding and accepting that it occurs is one of the first move toward doing this. Being conscious of your own natural inclination toward prejudice will help you catch yourself "in the act" and make necessary corrections because we are all likely to be biased at some point, whether we realize it or not. (Gould, W. R., 2022, November 8).

We can recognize our biasness by questioning ourselves at the moment like:

- ❖ Why am I thinking like this?
- ❖ Do I completely know about the person or group?
- ❖ Am I having the proof that whatever I am thinking is correct?
- ❖ Am I getting biased toward this person, group or situation?

In addition to questioning ourselves we can reduce or eliminate the prejudices in different ways; like we can be empathetic towards others that is we are keeping ourselves at their place and then think. For example: If someone is highly qualified but not able to find a better job, instead of judging them, we can put our feet in the same shoes and understanding their situation, thinking from their mind will help us to become non-judgmental and we will be less likely to be biased. (Gould, W. R., 2022, November 8). Other ways to overcome prejudices can be:

1. We can imagine how it feels to be prejudged on basis of work, education, race, gender etc.
2. Communicating with other groups and update ourselves by taking knowledge about other groups or people and their social settings and norms. It helps to reduce or eliminate common stereotypes about them.

3. Spending quality time with other groups or people.
4. Communicating openly about prejudices that can commonly occur in society around us.
5. Following the laws and **humanity** that will help us to give equal and fair treatment to others and help to reduce biases from our minds and at large from our society.

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