

## **Defensive Pessimism and Self-Handicapping among School Students in Relation to their Gender**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of present study was to investigate gender differences in defensive pessimism and self-handicapping along with their relationship among secondary school students'. The sample of the study was 10<sup>th</sup> grade 200 secondary school students, selected randomly from four randomly selected government school in Haryana. The data was collected with the help of two scales: defensive pessimism and self-handicapping. The defensive pessimism scale was constructed to measure reflectivity and defensive expectations thus providing two dimensional scores and their summated value for defensive pessimism score. On the other hand, Hindi version of self-handicapping scale (Jones & Rhodewalt,1982) was used for the study. The t-test result shows that there is no significant gender difference in defensive pessimism both in testing of reflectivity, and defensive expectations along with total defensive pessimism of secondary school students. Whereas female secondary school students had significantly higher level of self-handicapping, thereby indicating girl students. Further the relationship between self-handicapping and defensive pessimism was not significant across gender groups of secondary school students, suggesting that both the variables do not relate with each other. The implications of the study have been laid down in the light of these results on gender differences in defensive pessimism and self-handicapping among secondary school students.*

**Key words:** *gender differences, defensive pessimism, self-handicapping, school students*

### **Introduction**

Individuals irrespective of age use a variety of strategies to deal with threats to their self-worth. Defensive pessimists set unrealistically low expectations and think through a variety of possible outcomes, prior to events in which their performance is to be evaluated. Thus, two components underpinning defensive pessimism have been distinguished in the literature: defensive expectations and reflectivity, (Riveiro, 2014) in adopting a defensively pessimistic approach, individuals acknowledge and think through their apprehensions and this thinking-through process (reflectivity) keep defensive pessimists feeling less anxious and more in control (Norem & Illingworth, 1993). With the increase in effort that accompanies defensive pessimism, performance is often subsequently unimpaired (Norem & Cantor, 1986b). Moreover, setting lower, and possibly safer, expectations can serve to establish performance standards that are less

difficult to achieve (Showers & Ruben, 1990), and thus may lower the threshold for satisfactory performance; people sometimes seem to deliberately cut themselves off from opportunities to learn about themselves. Perhaps the best researched of these tactics is “self-handicapping” (Baumgardner & Brownlee, 1987; Berglas & Jones, 1978). There are two main types of self-handicapping i.e., behavioral self-handicapping and claimed self-handicapping (Haemmerlie et al., 1988) observed that individuals generally use self-handicapping before an activity which perhaps menace self-respect, as well as give a feasible justification regarding non-success in lieu of picking entire authority on oneself. Self-handicapping has been identified of two types, one is behavioral handicapping and another is claimed handicapping. Behavioral Self-handicapping: These are the apparent actions which decrease the success probability. In spite of the fact that these are occasionally perceived extra negative, these are more effective and convincing because of their visible nature. For example decreased endeavor as well as exercise, moreover, favoring towards effort within disturbing conditions. Claimed Self- Handicapping: These are assertion which are used as impediments towards attainment which actually perhaps or not perhaps accurate because these unable to see. This kind of self-handicapping has low effect on performance. For example psychological as well as health problems, bad mood, a traumatic event. Defensive pessimism coping technique used by individuals who set low expectations for situations regardless of prior success. These negative expectations are used to alleviate individuals’ anxiety about situations by motivating them to plan ways to avoid the chances of poor outcomes. However research to date has examined that men are more behaviorally handicapped than women (Kimble, Funk, & Dapolitio, 1990). Women use claimed handicapping even in the academic domain (Hirt et al., 1991; Rhodewalt, 1990). It is also reported that both self-handicapping and defensive expectations are negatively associated with self-regulation and persistence, whereas reflectivity is positively associated with their outcomes (Martin et al., 2003). (Rhodewalt and Tragakis 2011) pointed out that one of the reasons for resorting to self-handicapping is the desire to protect one self and the public reputation, the belief of individuals that their ability is relatively consistent with the lack of self- confidence, which leads to self- handicapping: behavioral handicapping is more damaging because it gives less chances of success but the same time being more persuasive than pretense (Sahrance, 2011). The self-handicapping reflects general anxiety, stress and moods from examination or health problems (Tadik, et.,al 2017: Sahrance, 2011). It is general tendency to be high thought, there is a significant difference in automatic negative thoughts among males and females. On the other hand there is no significant gender difference in defensive pessimism females (Reddy et al., 2020). In another (Perry and Skitka, 2009) found high defensive pessimist women performed better in tendencies high

stereotype threat condition. The women who were allowed to reflect about the possible test showed decreased anxiety when compared to women who were distracted in their thinking.

Taking a considerable account in the explanation of defensive pessimism and self-handicapping among male and female groups of population, the present research looked at gender differences in defensive pessimism and self-handicapping.

### **Objectives**

1. To study gender differences in defensive pessimism and self-handicapping among secondary school students.
2. To study a relationship of self-handicapping with defensive pessimism among secondary school students across gender.

### **Hypothesis**

1. There will be no significant difference in defensive pessimism and self-handicapping male and female secondary school students.
2. There will be no significant relationship between self-handicapping and defensive pessimism for secondary school students across gender groups.

### **Methodology**

Descriptive method of research was used to conduct the present study.

### **Sample**

A representative sample of 200, 10<sup>th</sup> grade government secondary school students in the state of Haryana was selected giving due weightage to location.

### **Tool used**

Defensive pessimism scale- Defensive pessimism scale developed and constructed by investigator was used to measure reflectivity and defensive expectations among senior secondary school students. It consists of 25 items (13 measuring reflectivity and 12 items measuring defensive expectations) on a seven point scale (1-7 i.e. very untrue of true of me thus providing scores of reflectivity and defensive pessimism scores.

Hindi version of Self-handicapping scale (Jones & Rhodwalt 1982) was used in the study. It consists of 25 items to be rated on a five point scale (1-6 i.e. disagree very much to agree very much). The scale provides unidimensional score to indicate level of handicapping low to high.

### Procedure

The 10<sup>th</sup> grade secondary school students in their classroom were given a set of tools measuring their defensive pessimism and self-handicapping. They were instructed how to fill the tool and were assured about the confidentiality of their responses. They were requested to answer every item as truly as they could.

### Statistical Techniques

The *t*-test was applied to test significant of mean differences in Defensive Pessimism and Self-Handicapping of secondary school students. Product moment correlation was used to find out relationship between defensive Pessimism with self-handicapping of secondary school students.

### Results

The results of *t*-test, testing the significance of mean difference between male and female secondary school students, on defensive pessimism and self-handicapping reported in table-1.

**Table-1-**

S.No.	Variables	Male (N=100)		Female (N=100)		M <sub>D</sub>	t-value
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1	Defensive Pessimism (Reflectivity)	63.78	8.37	64.20	9.21	10.42	0.99
2	Defensive Pessimism (Defensive Expectations)	48.40	7.49	50.52	6.84	2.12	0.85
3	Defensive Pessimism (Total)	112.18	9.89	114.72	12.44	2.54	0.34
4	Self-handicapping	101.60	13.89	113.92	28.80	12.32	8.48**

**\*\*P<.01**

Table-1 shows that female secondary school students have mean scores of 64.20, 50.52 and 114.72, on defensive pessimism (Reflectivity), defensive pessimism (defensive expectations) defensive pessimism (total) respectively. The respective means scores of male secondary school students were 63.78, 48.40 and 112.18. The *t*-value testing the significance of new difference, turned out to be, 0.99, 0.84, 0.34, respectively on the valuable of defensive pessimism (Reflectivity, defensive expectation and total). Mean difference in self-handicapping of male and female secondary school students significant at .01 levels. The female secondary school students had higher mean score 113.92 is

compared to 101.60 of males. These results are suggestive that female students have significantly higher level. Thus the hypotheses there will be no significant relationship between self-handicapping and defensive pessimism for secondary school students across gender groups was partially accepted of self-handicapping than their male counterparts, though they do not differ in defensive pessimism.

The results of relationship of defensive pessimism with self-handicapping for male and female secondary school students reported in table-2

**Table-2**

Co-relation Matrix: Defensive pessimism and self-handicapping among secondary school students across gender (N=100 each)

SR.NO.		Reflectivity	Defensive expectations	Total	Self-handicapping
1	Reflectivity	1.00	.225*	.676**	-0.27
2	Defensive expectations	.184	1.00	.566**	.103
3	Total	.841**	.686**	1.00	.055
4	Self-handicapping	-.003	-.158	.089	1.00

**\*\*P<.01**

**Note-** The r values in the upper part of diagonal are for the male group and below the diagonal are for the female group of secondary school students.

The coefficients of correlation of self-handicapping with defensive pessimism (reflectivity) defensive pessimism (defensive expectations) defensive pessimism (total) came out to be -.027, .103, .055 male school students. On the other hand the coefficient of correlation of self-handicapping with defensive pessimism (reflectivity) defensive pessimism (defensive expectations) defensive pessimism (total) for the female students turned out to be -.003, -.158, .089. None of the coefficient is significant at .05 levels. Hence the hypothesis there will be no significant relationship between self-handicapping and defensive pessimism for secondary school students across gender groups was accepted. This indicates that there is no significant relationship between defensive pessimism and self-handicapping among secondary school students across the gender groups.

## **Discussion**

Self-handicapping in combination with defensive pessimism is in a way demotivator for school students to perform at the expected level of excellence in academic pursuits. No doubt self-handicapping has been considered to be having positive consequences mainly in terms of enhancing lower level of self-esteem and performance and reduction in punitive sanction in teaching-learning process. However self-handicapping is having negative consequences in the long run mainly in terms of lowered levels of performance and satisfaction reading to continuous of self-handicapping (Rodewalt & Davison, 1986; Zuckerman et al., 1998; Ryska, 2002; Schwinger et al., 2014; Chadwick & Raver, 2015). In other words the students showing higher levels of defensive pessimism put up their levels at lower level to perform which is further endorsed by tendencies to use self-handicapping as a defensive mechanism. In case of girls students exhibiting higher levels of self-handicapping and tendencies to be more defensive pessimistic than boys is a matter of concern for gender equality in school education. This calls for breaking the negative effect of self-handicapping by behavior therapy to help in attitudinal changes along with improving feeling an evaluation about self. The promotion of group cohesion activity in the school practices is expected to promote students' expectation to do well. The teacher expectations model (fixing higher level of students' performance can trigger the chain to self-improvement in student's academic pursuits). More and more girls' entry into secondary education due to universalization of elementary education and gender equality measures have male than to be somewhat pessimistic and have work shirkers. This promotes girls to performance at lower levels of excellence. This consequently teaches to personality disorder in terms of self-handicapping and defensive pessimism. It is interesting to note that girls outperform boys in secondary school examinations, which needs on exploration the causation of high performance in terms of self-handicapping and defensive pessimism along with other attributes in academic success.

## **Conclusion**

There is tendencies of girl students to be more self-handicappers and defensive pessimistic than school boys, though significant only in case of self-handicapping. There is no significant relationship between self-handicapping and defensive pessimism across a gender groups of secondary school students.

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