

Understanding Social-Psychological Prejudice Among Adolescents

ORTENCA KOTHERJA
Department Pedagogy-Psychology
University of Social Science
Tirane,
ALBANIA

Abstract: - Adolescence represents a critical developmental period characterized by significant social, psychological, and emotional changes. During this stage, young people develop their identities, establish social relationships, and form attitudes toward themselves and others. One of the important social phenomena influencing adolescent development is prejudice, which represents a complex and persistent issue that may affect interpersonal relationships, social inclusion, and psychological well-being. This study aims to examine the level of prejudice among adolescents and explore its social and psychological dimensions. Specifically, the study investigates adolescents' understanding of prejudice, their perceptions of prejudice within Albanian society, and their experiences related to prejudicial attitudes. A quantitative research approach was employed. The study involved 300 adolescents aged 15–18 years from two public secondary schools in Elbasan, Albania. Data were collected through a 19-item questionnaire developed by the researcher, designed to assess adolescents' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences related to prejudice. The findings indicate that adolescents recognize prejudice as an existing social phenomenon and perceive it as present within Albanian society. The results also show that adolescents experience prejudice in different forms, particularly related to appearance, clothing, behaviours, social background, and ethnicity. These experiences may negatively influence adolescents' emotional well-being, self-perception, and sense of belonging. The study highlights the importance of educational and social interventions aimed at reducing prejudice and promoting inclusive environments. Strengthening awareness among students, teachers, families, and communities may contribute to the development of more accepting and respectful social relationships among young people.

Key-Words: - *social prejudice; adolescents; diversity; psychological impact; socialization; discrimination*

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1. Introduction

Prejudice represents a complex and persistent social phenomenon that affects individuals, groups, and communities across different societies and age groups. In everyday life, people may encounter experiences related to prejudice, racism, discrimination, and social exclusion, ranging from offensive language and negative stereotypes to more severe forms of psychological and physical violence. These experiences demonstrate that prejudice remains an important social challenge that influences interpersonal relationships, social inclusion, and psychological well-being. Prejudice is generally understood as a negative evaluation, judgment,

or emotional response directed toward individuals or groups based on their perceived membership in a particular social category rather than their individual characteristics. The classical definition provided by [13] describes prejudice as “an antipathy based on erroneous and inflexible generalizations,” which may be expressed toward a group or toward individuals belonging to that group. According to [3], fear, uncertainty, and limited knowledge about others represent important factors contributing to the development of prejudicial attitudes. From a social-psychological perspective, prejudice develops through multiple cognitive, emotional, and social processes. Individuals tend to

categorize people into social groups, distinguishing between those perceived as belonging to their own group (in-group) and those considered different (out-group). This categorization may create feelings of belonging and security within one's own group while contributing to negative attitudes toward others [5]. Furthermore, cognitive processes such as the halo effect and fundamental attribution error may reinforce biased interpretations of individuals' behaviors and characteristics [9]. Prejudice is also strongly influenced by socialization processes. Socialization Theory and Conformity Theory emphasize that attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are developed through interactions with family members, peers, educational environments, and broader social contexts. Research indicates that prejudicial attitudes are often connected to cultural norms, social values, and beliefs transmitted across generations. Therefore, young people may acquire and reproduce prejudicial attitudes through the social environments in which they grow and develop. Adolescence represents a particularly important developmental period for examining the formation of social attitudes and prejudices. This stage is characterized by significant biological, psychological, emotional, and social changes, during which individuals develop their identity, independence, and social competencies. Adolescents become increasingly concerned with peer acceptance, social recognition, and their position within society, making them particularly sensitive to social influences. Research has shown that adolescence is a critical period for the development of social values, political attitudes, and perceptions of different social groups [4]. Although prejudicial attitudes may begin to develop during childhood, social influences become increasingly important during adolescence [10] [12]. Family relationships, peer networks, school environments, and cultural contexts play a significant role in shaping adolescents' attitudes toward diversity and social groups. According to [12], prejudice during childhood and adolescence is influenced by developmental and social factors. While age-related influences are stronger during

childhood, social experiences and contextual factors become increasingly influential during adolescence. At this stage, adolescents' need for belonging and acceptance may affect how they perceive themselves and others.

Prejudice during adolescence may have significant consequences for identity development, social relationships, self-esteem, and psychological well-being. Experiences of exclusion or discrimination may negatively influence young people's sense of belonging and their ability to develop positive relationships with others. Therefore, understanding the factors that contribute to adolescent prejudice is essential for promoting inclusive attitudes, reducing discrimination, and supporting healthy social development. Although prejudice has been widely studied internationally, limited research has examined adolescents' perceptions and experiences of prejudice within the Albanian educational context. Exploring how adolescents understand and experience prejudice is particularly important because schools represent key environments for social interaction, identity development, and the promotion of inclusive values. Therefore, this study focuses on adolescents in Elbasan, Albania, aiming to provide empirical insights into the level, perception, and social-psychological dimensions of prejudice among young people.

2 Problem Formulation

Objectives and Research Questions

The objectives and research questions of this study are formulated as follows:

Objectives:

To explore adolescents' understanding and perception of the concept of prejudice.

To assess the level of prejudice perceived within Albanian society from adolescents' perspectives.

To examine adolescents' awareness of prejudicial attitudes and their self-perception regarding prejudice.

To identify the adolescent groups or dimensions that are more frequently associated with

prejudicial experiences and to explore adolescents' experiences of feeling prejudiced.

Research Questions:

- To what extent do adolescents understand the concept of prejudice, and how do they perceive this phenomenon?
- To what extent do adolescents perceive themselves as being influenced by the level of prejudice present in Albanian society?
- What is the level of prejudice among adolescents, and to what extent do they recognize prejudicial attitudes in themselves?
- Which aspects of social life contribute most to adolescents' experiences of being prejudiced or discriminated against?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the meaning and impact of prejudice during adolescence, a developmental stage characterized by important social and psychological changes.

Second, the study provides empirical evidence regarding the dimensions of prejudice among adolescents and contributes to the measurement and understanding of this complex social phenomenon.

Third, through a quantitative research approach, the findings may support educators, policymakers, and social institutions in developing strategies aimed at reducing prejudice and promoting inclusive environments for young people.

Finally, this study provides a foundation for further research on prejudice among adolescents by highlighting the importance of examining its social, psychological, and educational implications within the Albanian context.

3. Methodology

This study was conducted based on the research objectives and questions defined for examining adolescents' understanding, perceptions, and experiences related to prejudice. The methodological approach was designed to

collect empirical data and provide a basis for the interpretation of findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Data were collected through an anonymous online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The online format allowed participants to complete the questionnaire voluntarily and ensured that no personally identifiable information was collected. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses.

3.1 Participants and Study Sample

The study was conducted in two public secondary schools in the city of Elbasan, Albania. The study sample consisted of 300 adolescents aged between 15 and 18 years. Participants were randomly selected from the two schools.

The sample included 159 female participants (53%) and 141 male participants (47%), indicating a relatively balanced distribution according to gender.

3.2 Research Instrument and Procedure

A quantitative research approach was employed in this study. Data were collected through a questionnaire developed by the researcher to explore adolescents' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences related to prejudice.

Before the main data collection, a pilot study was conducted with 50 adolescents to assess the clarity, comprehensibility, and appropriateness of the questionnaire items. Based on the feedback obtained during the pilot phase, the final version of the questionnaire was administered to 300 high school students.

The questionnaire consisted of 19 items addressing different aspects of prejudice, including adolescents' understanding of the concept, their perceptions of prejudice within society, personal experiences of prejudice, and the social and psychological consequences associated with prejudicial experiences.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The study included 300 adolescents from two public secondary schools in Elbasan, Albania. Among the participants, 159 were females (53%) and 141 were males (47%). The relatively balanced gender distribution provides representation of both groups within the study sample.

The results are presented according to the objectives and research questions of the study.

4.2 Adolescents' Understanding of the Concept of Prejudice

The first objective of the study was to examine adolescents' understanding and perception of the concept of prejudice. Participants were asked how they defined prejudice. The findings showed that 39% of adolescents perceived prejudice as a negative thought, 25% described it as a negative judgment, 20% associated it with a violation of rights, while 16% considered it a reflection of limited mentality. These findings suggest that adolescents demonstrate awareness of prejudice as a negative social phenomenon. The responses indicate that young people recognize prejudice as a form of judgment that may negatively influence relationships between individuals and social groups.

4.3 Adolescents' Perceptions of Prejudice in Albanian Society

The second objective was to explore adolescents' perceptions regarding the presence of prejudice in Albanian society. The results indicated that adolescents perceive prejudice as an existing social phenomenon. Specifically, 41% of participants reported that Albanian society is prejudiced, 32% stated that society is often influenced by prejudice, 20% indicated that prejudice exists sometimes, while only 7% believed that Albanian society is not affected by prejudice. These findings suggest that adolescents perceive prejudice as a social issue influenced by cultural values, social norms, and collective attitudes. Such perceptions highlight the importance of educational initiatives aimed at promoting acceptance, diversity, and social inclusion.

4.4 Adolescents' Experiences and Attitudes Related to Prejudice

The third objective examined adolescents' own experiences and attitudes regarding prejudice. The findings showed that 61% of participants reported experiencing or expressing prejudicial attitudes toward their peers, while 39% reported that they did not experience or express such attitudes.

These results indicate that peer relationships represent an important context in which prejudice may occur during adolescence. However, these findings should be interpreted as reported experiences and perceptions rather than as fixed characteristics of adolescents.

Participants were also asked about the situations in which they experienced prejudice. The results indicated that appearance-related factors, particularly clothing and physical characteristics, were among the most common sources of prejudicial experiences. Adolescents reported being judged by peers or others based on their clothing style, behavior, body image, and personal characteristics.

4.5 Dimensions and Psychological Consequences of Prejudice Experiences

The fourth objective focused on identifying the aspects in which adolescents most frequently experience prejudice and the emotional consequences associated with these experiences.

The analysis of the open-ended responses showed that clothing was the most frequently reported aspect associated with prejudice, mentioned by 32% of participants. Other reported dimensions included behavior (24%), ethnicity/race (18%), social background or group acceptance (14%), and physical appearance (12%).

Regarding the emotional impact of prejudice, 39% of adolescents reported feeling very negatively when experiencing prejudice from others, while 28% reported feelings of being underestimated or inferior. Additionally, 13% indicated feelings of social exclusion, and 9% reported difficulties expressing their emotions.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that prejudice may have meaningful social and psychological consequences for adolescents, affecting their

self-esteem, emotional well-being, and sense of belonging within their social environments.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that prejudice remains a relevant social phenomenon within Albanian society and is perceived by adolescents as an important issue affecting social relationships and interactions. The results demonstrate that adolescents recognize the presence of prejudice in their social environment and report experiencing prejudicial attitudes in different forms. The development of prejudice is influenced by multiple social, cultural, and psychological factors. During adolescence, individuals are particularly sensitive to social influences from their immediate environments, including family, peers, schools, and the wider community. These social contexts play an important role in shaping attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions toward others. The findings suggest that prejudicial attitudes may be influenced by values, social norms, and cultural patterns transmitted through socialization processes. Family and community environments may contribute to the reproduction of certain attitudes across generations, highlighting the importance of early educational interventions that promote tolerance, acceptance, and respect for diversity. The study identified several areas in which adolescents experience prejudice, including physical appearance, clothing style, social background, behavior, and racial or ethnic characteristics. These experiences may negatively influence adolescents' emotional well-being, self-perception, and sense of belonging.

In conclusion, prejudice continues to represent a significant social and psychological challenge that requires coordinated efforts from educational institutions, families, policymakers, and communities. Promoting equal opportunities, social awareness, and positive intergroup relationships is essential for reducing prejudicial attitudes and supporting more inclusive environments for young people.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed:

Schools should organize educational programs and training activities led by school psychologists and other professionals to increase awareness about the causes and consequences of prejudice among adolescents.

Focus groups involving adolescents, teachers, and parents should be implemented to explore experiences of prejudice and identify effective strategies for prevention and reduction.

School leaders and educational administrators should develop policies and initiatives that promote inclusion, respect for diversity, and reflection on prejudicial attitudes.

Schools and communities should create safe spaces where adolescents can openly discuss their emotional experiences, social challenges, and experiences related to prejudice.

Educational interventions should encourage positive peer relationships and intercultural dialogue as protective factors against prejudice and discrimination.

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