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## International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research (IJAMR)

ISSN: 2393-8870

www.ijarm.com

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### Research Article

## Assessing Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) among University Postgraduates: A Multi-group comparison

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### Abstract

#### Keywords

Personal growth initiative;  
university postgraduates,  
personal growth initiative  
scale,  
multi-group comparison

This study was carried out to compare university postgraduates in different facets of personal growth initiative (PGI) in some demographic profiles i.e. age groups, gender, locality and faculty. Descriptive Survey Method was used. The sample was comprised of 960 postgraduates from three universities of Haryana State in India i.e. Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra (KUK), Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak (MDU) and Chaudhary Devi Lal University, Sirsa (CDLU) and chosen through purposive-cum-random sampling. Personal Growth Initiative Scale-II by Robitschek et al (2009) was used to measure PGI among university postgraduates and the reliability of PGIS-II was 0.741 in the present study. Results of the study indicated that university postgraduates were found to differ significantly in some aspects of personal growth initiative by age-groups, gender, locality and faculty. On the basis of that implications are discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Construct of Personal Growth Initiative (PGI)

It has been noted that in the world of growing complexities and escalating change, one can't be interested in understanding the factors that contribute to and enhance personal growth and development of the individuals. Recently, personal growth initiative (PGI) has emerged as a very important construct in furthering human development and personal fulfillment (Ogunyemi and Mabekoje, 2007). Personal growth means goals and accomplishments that encourage or prompt us to improve in one or other area of life. It is a continuous improvement process. Personal growth or self-guided improvement is an insight that starts from within help to move forward in life and produces personal change. Personal growth is a person's sense of ongoing growth and progression as an individual (Whittaker and Robitschek 2001). Initiative taken by the individual in self-change process plays an important role. Personal Initiative is a positive character trait that describes the degree to which one possesses the willingness and ability to take self-initiated action in the pursuit of his/her goal (Farmer, 2010). Personal initiative uses an active approach that is characterized by its

self-starting and proactive nature which implies that the goals are not given or assigned by someone else, but that the person himself or herself develops these goals (Fay and Frese, 2001).

Prochaska and DiClemente (1986) were among the first who define personal growth as a change within a person that is cognitive, behavioural or affective and hypothesize that it embraces development, environmental, and intentional processes, with intentional process being the most essential and asserted that there are three distinctive ways of personal growth

Growth that is unintentional and out of awareness  
Growth that is unintentional but in awareness  
Growth that is intentional and fully in awareness

Thus, personal growth can occur as a result of both intentional and unintentional processes. Robitschek (1998) states that the intentional process is the most important part of personal growth because the intentional process allows an individual to be fully conscious of the changes are occurring. Moreover, the intentional process leads the individual to be actively and

willing engaged in the process of growth. Therefore, when a person is concerned only with intentional self-change, that individual actively and intentionally engages in the self-change process in any life domain, the term is generally known as Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) (Robitschek, 1999).

Personal Growth Initiative (PGI) is an active and intentional engagement in the process of personal growth and in changing and developing as a person (Robitschek, 1998). PGI is a global inclination to improve one's self through active seeking out of self-growth experiences and is an orientation toward change and growth across life domains. It is a developed skill set, including cognition, behavior, attitude and motivation that a person carries into each life experience (Robitschek and Ashton et al., 2009). PGI can be thought of as a meta-cognitive construct, an awareness and control of intentional engagement in growth-enhancing cognitions and behaviours in all areas of life (Robitschek, 1998) and describes an orientation towards actively and purposefully engaging in the growth seeking process. PGI contains cognitive components e.g. motivation to change, knowledge of the change process and efficacy related to the change process and behavioral components e.g. general goals relating to personal change and plans to attain those goals (Robitschek, 2003; Martin, 2009). PGI is an acquired skill set for self-improvement across life domains and comprised of four components- *Readiness for Change, Planfulness, Using Resources and Intentional Behavior*. These four components function synergistically, rather than sequentially, to optimize personal growth.

Like all skill sets, level of PGI exists on a continuum from low to high. The level of PGI that a person has will influence the extent to which that person seeks out opportunities to grow, exploits opportunities that present themselves and is able to intentionally engage in the self-change process (Robitschek and Ashton et al., 2009). For example, an individual high in PGI might critically evaluate past, current, and future experiences to both determine potential areas for growth and monitor growth experiences. Behaviorally, these individuals would likely seek out experiences deemed important to personal growth. In contrast, an individual low in PGI would not consider growth as a criterion for examining past, current, and future experiences and therefore would not behaviorally seek out intentional growth experiences (Martin, 2009).

It can be said that Personal Growth Initiative (PGI; Robitschek, 1998, 1999) is a well-established construct that has been measured in a variety of populations. PGI research to date includes PGI and coping, career development, gender implications, physical health, well-being, family functioning and hope (Hardin, Weigold, and Robitschek, 2007; Robitschek, 1998, 1999; Robitschek and Cook, 1999; Shorey, Little, and Snyder, 2007; Whittaker and Robitschek, 2001). Bartley and Robitschek (2000) also investigated PGI as one of a multitude of factors that predict career exploration and

found PGI to be a significant correlation between environmental exploration and PGI for female college students. Moreover, significant positive correlations were found between PGI and goal-directedness and PGI and career decision-making self-efficacy in both men and women. Research suggested that PGI is a strong predictor of well-being, functioning and distress. In different samples, PGI accounted for 18 – 20% of the variance in emotional well-being, 20 – 27% of the variance in social well-being, and 32 – 51% of the variance in psychological well-being (Robitschek and Keyes, 2009). Furthermore, college students with high levels of PGI described high levels of vocational functioning and low levels of anxiety, depression, and general emotional distress (Robitschek and Cook, 1999; Robitschek and Kashubeck, 1999). Research by Robitschek and Kashubeck (1999) supported that positive family functioning can boost one's level of personal growth initiative. PGI is an important construct capable of enhancing general well-being of individuals.

## 2. Purpose of the study

The present study was an endeavor to compare university postgraduates in different aspects of personal growth initiative in some demographic profiles like age group, gender, locality and faculty.

## 3. Hypothesis of the study

*Ha<sub>1</sub>*: There exists a significant difference among university postgraduates in different aspects of personal growth initiative with respect to age groups.

*Ha<sub>2</sub>*: There exists a significant difference among university post graduates in different aspects of personal growth initiative by gender.

*Ha<sub>3</sub>*: There exists a significant difference among university postgraduates belonging to urban and rural area in different aspects of personal growth initiative.

*Ha<sub>4</sub>*: There exists a significant difference among university postgraduates of four faculties in various aspects of personal growth initiative.

## 4. Materials and Methods

**4.1 Method-** Descriptive Survey Method with Ex-post-facto design was used.

**4.2 Sample-** A sample of 960 university postgraduates was selected through Purposive- cum- Stratified random sampling. The participants were from three state universities of Haryana (India) i.e. Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra, Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak and Chaudhary Devi Lal University, Sirsa.

**4.3 Instrument for Data Collection-***Personal Growth Initiative Scale* by Robitschek et al (2009) was used. The scale included both cognitive as well as behavioural components. There are four subscales on the PGIS-II: Cognitive Components (Readiness for Change, Planfulness), Behavioural Components (Using Resources and Intentional Behavior). There are 16 items in all the four subscales and statements are presented subscale wise. All items are positively worded and given a score of ‘0’, ‘1’, ‘2’, ‘3’, ‘4’ and ‘5’ for Disagree Strongly, Disagree Somewhat, Disagree a Little, Agree a Little, Agree Somewhat and Agree Strongly respectively. A total score ranges from 0 to 80 showing low personal growth initiative to moderate and high personal growth initiative. The test-retest reliability of original PGIS-II ranges from 0.61 to 0.77 for American

sample. The Cronbach Alpha (reliability coefficient) for the current study was 0.741.

**4.4 Procedure for Data Collection-**The research instrument was administered on the subjects through face-to-face interaction by the researcher. The respondents were informed that the information given by them would be kept confidential and would be used for research purpose only. They were asked to follow the instructions given on each questionnaire. They took about 30 minutes to fill the questionnaires. The sheets were collected back on the spot. The response rate of filled in questionnaires was 85%.

**4.5 Statistical Techniques-** Frequency, Percentages, Pearson correlation coefficient and Stepwise regression analysis was used and data was analyzed by using SPSS 18.0 version.

## 5. Analysis and interpretation of data

### 5.1 Demographic information of participant-

**Table-1 Demographic information of participants**

Characteristics of the sample		Frequency	Percentages
<b>Gender</b>	Male	295	36%
	Female	523	64%
	Total	818	100%
<b>Age Group</b>	20-24 Years	732	89%
	Above 24 Years	86	11%
	Total	818	100%
<b>Locality</b>	Urban	417	51%
	Rural	401	49%
	Total	818	100%
<b>University</b>	KUK	266	32.52%
	MDU	292	35.70%
	CDLU	260	31.78%
	Total	818	100%
<b>Faculty</b>	Science	238	29.1%
	Education	185	22.6%
	Social Science	173	21.1%
	Commerce & Management	222	27.1%
	Total	818	100%
<b>Department</b>	Mathematics	114	13.9%
	Computer Science	125	15.3%
	Education	94	11.5%
	Physical Education	90	11.0%
	Economics	101	12.3%
	Public Administration	72	8.8%
	Commerce	108	13.2%
	Business Administration	114	13.9%
	Total	818	100.0%

**5.2 Comparison in different groups-** For making comparisons among different groups, Kruskal-Wallis one way ANOVA was used as given in the table 2:

**Table-2 Kruskal-Wallis One Way ANOVA: Personal Growth Initiative to Demographic Profiles**

S.No.	PGIS Items	Age		Gender		Locality		Faculty	
		t2	Sig.(p)	t2	Sig.(p)	t2	Sig.(p)	t2	Sig.(p)
1	I always ready to accept the changes	0.046	0.831	0.041	0.839	<b>6.243</b>	<b>0.012*</b>	<b>9.808</b>	<b>0.020*</b>
2	I figure out what I need to change about myself	3.287	0.070	3.106	0.078	0.862	0.353	<b>8.203</b>	<b>0.042*</b>
3	I know or have to go back on a time of significant change	0.348	0.555	1.490	0.222	<b>10.197</b>	<b>0.001*</b>	2.814	0.421
4	If I want to change something in my life, I initiate the transition process	2.030	0.154	<b>4.605</b>	<b>0.032*</b>	<b>4.374</b>	<b>0.036*</b>	4.194	0.241
5	I set realistic goals for what I want to change about myself	0.813	0.367	<b>4.271</b>	<b>0.039*</b>	1.955	0.162	<b>13.637</b>	<b>0.003*</b>
6	I know how to make a viable plan to change myself	0.971	0.324	<b>5.746</b>	<b>0.017*</b>	0.018	0.894	4.366	0.225
7	I have specific action plan to help me reach my goal	<b>4.098</b>	<b>0.043*</b>	<b>10.813</b>	<b>0.001*</b>	0.529	0.467	3.323	0.344
8	I can choose the goal to bring about changes in myself	1.602	0.206	<b>5.622</b>	<b>0.018*</b>	0.117	0.732	<b>9.949</b>	<b>0.019*</b>
9	I know steps I can take to make intentional changes in myself	<b>5.472</b>	<b>0.019*</b>	0.912	0.340	0.222	0.637	5.026	0.170
10	When I try to change myself, I ask for help	0.856	0.355	<b>6.924</b>	<b>0.009*</b>	<b>6.015</b>	<b>0.014*</b>	<b>41.190</b>	<b>0.000*</b>
11	I take advantages of resources, when I try to grow	2.090	0.148	<b>3.962</b>	<b>0.047*</b>	0.371	0.543	1.590	0.662
12	When I try to change myself, seek the support actively	0.082	0.774	0.584	0.445	0.071	0.790	3.240	0.356
13	I never miss the opportunity to grow my own	<b>8.915</b>	<b>0.003*</b>	<b>12.301</b>	<b>0.000*</b>	1.174	0.278	<b>35.427</b>	<b>0.000*</b>
14	I work actively trying to improve myself	2.417	0.120	<b>8.585</b>	<b>0.003*</b>	0.736	0.391	<b>25.025</b>	<b>0.000*</b>
15	I take charge of life to grow as a person	0.094	0.759	0.116	0.733	2.270	0.132	0.426	0.935
16	I look for opportunities to grow as a person	0.237	0.626	0.535	0.465	<b>7.449</b>	<b>0.006*</b>	3.232	0.357

\* *Bold values are significant*

**5.2.1. Comparison by age group-**From the table 2, it was analyzed that university postgraduates differ significantly in following aspects of PGIS:

I have specific action plan to help me reach my goal ( $\chi^2 = 4.098, p=0.043$ )

I know steps I can take to make intentional changes in myself ( $\chi^2 = 5.472, p=0.019$ )

I never miss the opportunity to grow my own with ( $\chi^2 = 8.915, p=0.003$ )

In other aspects, no significant difference was found among university postgraduates of different age groups.

**5.2.2. Comparison by gender-**Table 2 also revealed a significant difference between male and female university postgraduates in following aspects of PGIS:

If I want to change something in my life, I initiate the transition process ( $\chi^2 = 4.605, p=0.032$ )

I set realistic goals for what I want to change about myself ( $\chi^2 = 4.271, p= 0.039$ )

I know how to make a viable plan to change myself ( $\chi^2 = 5.746, p= 0.017$ )

I have specific action plan to help me reach my goal ( $\chi^2=10.813, p=0.001$ )

I can choose the goal to bring about changes in myself ( $\chi^2=5.622, p=0.018$ )

When I try to change myself, I ask for help ( $\chi^2=6.924, p=0.009$ )

I take advantages of resources, when I try to grow ( $\chi^2=3.962, p=0.047$ )

I never miss the opportunity to grow my own ( $\chi^2=12.301, p=0.000$ )

I work actively trying to improve myself ( $\chi^2=8.585, p=0.003$ )

In other aspects of PGIS, no significant difference was found among university postgraduates by gender.

**5.2.3. Comparison by locality-** From the table 2, significant difference was observed between university postgraduates belonging to urban and rural area in the following aspects of PGIS as given below:

I always ready to accept the changes ( $\chi^2=6.243, p=0.012$ )

I know or have to go back on a time of significant change ( $\chi^2=10.197, p=0.001$ )

If I want to change something in my life, I initiate the transition process ( $\chi^2=4.374, p=0.036$ )

When I try to change myself, I ask for help ( $\chi^2=6.015, p=0.014$ )

I look for opportunities to grow as a person ( $\chi^2=7.449, p=0.006$ )

In other aspects of PGIS, no significant difference was found among university postgraduates belonging to different localities.

**5.2.4. Comparison by faculties-** Table 2 also made it clear that university postgraduates of four different faculties differed significantly in seven aspects of PGIS as follows:

I always ready to accept the changes ( $\chi^2=9.808, p=0.020$ )

I figure out what I need to change about myself ( $\chi^2=8.203, p=0.042$ )

I set realistic goals for what I want to change about myself ( $\chi^2=13.637, p=0.003$ )

I can choose the goal to bring about changes in myself ( $\chi^2=9.949, p=0.019$ )

When I try to change myself, I ask for help ( $\chi^2=41.190, p=0.000$ )

I never miss the opportunity to grow my own ( $\chi^2=35.427, p=0.000$ )

I work actively trying to improve myself ( $\chi^2=25.025, p=0.000$ )

In other aspects of PGIS, university postgraduates of different faculties were not found to differ significantly.

## 5.3 Discussion of results

$H_{a1}$  viz. “*There exists a significant difference among university postgraduates in different aspects of personal growth initiative with respect to age groups*” was retained as university postgraduates of two age groups i.e. 20-24 years (mean, 57.98) and Above 24 years (54.97) were found to differ significantly in three out of sixteen aspects of personal growth initiative i.e. “I have specific action plan to help me reach my goal, I know steps I can take to make intentional changes in myself and I never miss the opportunity to grow my own”. The result is contradictory to the findings of Robitschek (1998) who investigated that PGIS did not seem to be meaningfully related to age in a sample of United States. The difference in two age groups may be due to the reasons that at the younger age students are mature enough to have action plan for achieving goal, proper planning for bringing change and never missing the opportunity to become a better person.

$H_{a2}$  viz. “*There exists a significant difference among university postgraduates in different aspects of personal growth initiative by gender*” was retained as male and female university postgraduates were found to differ significantly in nine out of sixteen aspects of PGIS. Thus, gender differences were found to be existed for PGIS. Further, it was revealed that female postgraduates were found to score higher (mean, 58.38) on PGIS than male postgraduates (mean, 56.42). The result of the study is in agreement with Robitschek and Cook (1999) who reported that women scored higher than their counterpart on PGIS.

$H_{a3}$  viz. “*There exists a significant difference among university postgraduates belonging to urban and rural area in different aspects of personal growth initiative*” was retained as university postgraduates of urban (mean, 57.71) and rural (mean, 57.62) area were found to differ significantly in five aspects of PGIS. The minor difference may be due to the reasons that postgraduates belonging to urban area were always ready to accept the changes, learning from their past experiences and they ask for help and looking for opportunities to become a better person.

$H_{a4}$  viz. “*There exists a significant difference among university postgraduates of four faculties in various aspects of personal growth initiative*” was retained as university postgraduates were found to differ significantly in seven out of sixteen aspects of PGIS. Further, it was found that postgraduates from Faculty of Science (mean, 59.25) were showing better PGI than Faculty of Commerce and Management (mean, 57.64), Faculty of Education (mean, 56.81) and Faculty of Social Sciences (mean, 56.42). The possible reasons for this difference may be that they were showing readiness for change, they can figure out what

changes they want, by choosing and setting realistic goals, never missing the opportunities to grow and becoming a better person and they were actively involving themselves in change process.

## 6. Findings of the study

1. The findings of the study revealed that two age groups i.e. 20-24 years and above 24 years of university postgraduates were found to differ significantly in three aspects of PGI i.e. I have specific action plan to help me reach my goal, I know steps I can take to make intentional changes in myself and I never miss the opportunity to grow my own. In other aspects, no significant difference was found between two age groups.

2. Results also showed that university postgraduates were found to differ significantly in different aspects of PGI by gender. It was also revealed that female postgraduates were better in taking personal growth initiative than their counterparts. The possible explanation for this may be that the female may be initiating the transition process by choosing the realistic goals through active and viable plans and exploit the resources for bringing change and never miss the opportunity to change as compared to their counterparts. The findings were contradictory to Hardin, Weigold and Robitschek (2007) who found no significant difference between women and men on PGIS.

3. The findings also concluded that university postgraduates belonging to urban and rural areas were found to differ significantly in five aspects of PGIS. Further, it was revealed that postgraduates belonging to urban area were found to be better in PGI as compared to their counterparts. The reason for this difference may be that postgraduates in urban area may be more ready for change, learning from their past experiences for bringing change, looking upon opportunity to grow, asking for help and for initiating the transition process.

4. Results also indicated that university postgraduates of four faculties were found to differ significantly in seven different aspects of PGI. Further, it was examined that postgraduates from Faculty of Science were showing better initiative for personal growth than Faculty of Commerce and Management followed Faculty of Education and Faculty of Social Sciences. The possible reasons for this difference may be that postgraduates in four faculties were showing difference in readiness for change, they can figure out what changes they want, by choosing and setting realistic goals, never missing the opportunities to grow and becoming a better person and they were actively involving themselves in change process.

## 7. Implications of the study

1. It was revealed that two age groups were found to differ significantly in some aspects of personal growth initiative.

Therefore, it is advised to university postgraduates to improve upon those aspects like exploiting opportunity, making action plan for reaching the goal and identifying the steps for making intentional changes to grow as a better person.

2. Findings revealed that female were better than male university postgraduates in taking initiative for personal growth. So, it is suggested to male university postgraduates that they can enhance their personal growth initiative by choosing the goal, figuring out the changes, making viable action plan, by seeking help and using resources, by working actively and by not missing the opportunities and capitalizing on those opportunities to bring self-change.

3. Results also indicated that postgraduates from urban area were better in PGI than their counterparts. Therefore, it is suggested to university postgraduates from rural area that they should always be ready for bringing even small changes in their lives. They should take into consideration their previous experiences to grow in life. Moreover, they should not feel shy for taking help from different resources and should grab the opportunities to grow and become a better person.

4. It was also found that university postgraduates belonging to Faculty of Education and Social Science were lower in PGI than other two faculties. So, it is recommended to university postgraduates that they can improve upon their initiative for personal growth by thinking about in which domain they want change, why they want this change, by laying out the strategies for making an improvement in them and actively involved in change process.

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