Factors Influencing Inferiority Feelings: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT
Inferiority feelings is a complex phenomenon arising from perceptions of deficiency, both real and imagined. This systematic review analyzes 14 international journals and finds that inferiority feeling is influenced by various internal, external, and demographic factors. Internal factors, such as physical disabilities, contingent self-esteem, and emotional intelligence, significantly contribute to individuals' perceptions of themselves. Meanwhile, external factors, including parenting styles and social exclusion, as well as demographic factors like parental education levels and socioeconomic conditions, also have a significant impact. These findings emphasize the need for a holistic approach in understanding and addressing inferiority feeling, which can serve as a guideline for designing effective interventions in both educational and family settings.
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INTRODUCTION

Inferiority feelings, refer to a psychological condition in which an individual perceives themselves as unworthy, less capable, or inferior compared to others. According to Adler (as cited in Yuniati, Andrianie, & Sulistyawati, 2018), inferiority feelings encompass any sense of worthlessness arising from psychological or social incapability perceived subjectively or due to physical imperfections. This sense of inadequacy or inferiority stems from feelings of being less valuable or less capable in various areas of life (Yuniati, Andrianie, & Sulistyawati, 2018).

This condition has the potential to affect individuals in various aspects of life, ranging from mental health to social interactions and also academically achievements. When individuals feel inferior, they often become trapped in negative thought patterns that lead them to doubt their abilities and self-worth. Inferiority feelings often occur unconsciously and can drive individuals to engage in overcompensation, either through spectacular achievements, extreme antisocial behavior, or both of it (Alwisol, 2019). The impact of these feelings should not be underestimated; in the long term, they can

lead to various mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Individuals experiencing an inferiority complex tend to avoid social situations, feel alienated, and struggle to establish healthy relationships with others. Additionally, people with inferiority feelings generally exhibit sensitivity or aversion to criticism, a strong appreciation for praise or recognition, a tendency to criticize or belittle others, a lack of enthusiasm for competition, a preference for solitude, and behaviors marked by shyness and timidity (Yuniati, Andrianie, & Sulistyawati, 2018)

One of the most significant consequences of inferiority feelings is their impact on an individual's quality of life. Inferiority feelings can hinder academic and professional achievements, as individuals who perceive themselves as incapable may avoid taking risks or pursuing new opportunities. Those who experiencing such feelings often engage in various compensatory behaviors to cope with their sense of inadequacy. Common strategies include making excuses, displaying aggressive behavior, and withdrawing from social interactions. This creates a vicious cycle, where inferiority feelings impede progress, which in turn reinforces a lack of self-confidence. In the educational context, this phenomenon is increasingly relevant due to the often overwhelming academic pressures and societal expectations. Individuals who trapped in inferiority feelings may fail to fully realize their potential, negatively impacting their future career prospects. This is consistent with research by Karino (2018), which highlights a significant negative relationship between inferiority feelings and future orientation in adolescents. Adolescents caught in a state of inferiority often lack confidence in their abilities, making them reluctant to try new things.

There are numerous factors that influence inferiority feelings, both internal to the individual and external from their environment. Painful childhood experiences, such as unsupportive parenting or negative judgments from parents, can establish the foundation for the emergence of inferiority feelings later in life. The influence of the social environment, including cultural norms and societal expectations, is also highly significant. According to Adler (as cited in Noviekayati et al., 2021), two key factors contribute to inferiority feelings: two contrasting treatments experienced by children during childhood—being overly pampered and being rejected. These experiences can lead children to lack the confidence to express their opinions and to prioritize others' abilities over their own. Strano and Petrocelli (2005) further identify additional factors contributing to inferiority feelings, including parental attitudes, physical deficiencies, mental limitations, and social inadequacies.

In the digital era, social media plays a significant role in shaping individuals' self-image. In some cases, social comparisons on social media platforms can exacerbate inferiority feelings, as individuals perceive themselves as unable to meet the standards set by others. Excessive use of social media has further worsened this situation. People are frequently exposed to idealized representations of their friends' lives and achievements, which can lead to feelings of worthlessness. This aligns with research conducted by Uniyal (2023), which found that excessive social media use is associated

with increased inferiority feelings and dissatisfaction with oneself among adolescents. This highlights the negative impact of the digital environment on adolescents' mental health.

Other factors, such as social status, financial situation, and the quality of interpersonal relationships, can also contribute to inferiority feelings. Individuals experiencing financial difficulties are often more vulnerable to feelings of worthlessness, as highlighted in research conducted by Sutinah (2020). Additionally, dissatisfaction in social relationships, whether with peers or partners, can add psychological burdens that lead to inferiority feelings. All these factors are interconnected, forming a complex network that influences how individuals perceive themselves.

Based on the explanation above, several research have highlighted various factors that contribute to the emergence of inferiority feelings in individuals. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to systematically understand the factors influencing the development of such feelings. This is considered important because a deeper understanding of these factors can aid in identifying individuals at risk of experiencing inferiority feelings and in developing more effective interventions to address this issue. Additionally, by uncovering the root causes of inferiority feelings, we can create a more supportive and positive environment that fosters the development of a healthy self-concept and improves individuals' quality of life.

METHOD

This research employs a Library Research or Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method based on the PRISMA (Protocol Review Systematic and Meta-Analysis) guidelines. The application of PRISMA aims to enhance the quality of the review procedures and the systematic reporting of results (Liberati et al., 2009; Mother et al., 2009). The SLR method, as defined by Kitchenham (2004), is utilized to compile a review of relevant research findings related to factors influencing inferiority feelings among adolescents. This research aims to provide readers with an analysis and insights drawn from various scholarly sources published in international journals relevant to this research topic (Creswell, 2012). Through this literature review, the researchers hope to deepen their knowledge of the chosen field of study and the issues being investigated.

The process of conducting a systematic review begins with the review planning phase (identifying benefits and development), where researchers formulate the review question using the PICO (Population, Concept, Context) framework to define the scope of the study. The research question for this systematic review is: *What are the factors influencing inferiority feelings?* This is followed by the review execution phase, which involves searching for journals, selecting studies, assessing quality, and conducting extraction and synthesis. The researchers designed a precise search protocol using the primary keyword "*Inferiority Feeling*" for databases such as Scopus and Google Scholar. All retrieved journals were downloaded and checked for duplicates using the Rayyan

application. After duplicate checks, the researchers screened the titles and abstracts. Journals with relevant titles and abstracts were further reviewed in full. Out of 200 journals initially identified, only 15 met the specific criteria, focusing on factors influencing inferiority feelings. The final stage involved preparing the report based on the selected journals, adhering to predefined limitations, such as publication year (2018–2024), language (English), and clarity of research methodology.

The selection flowchart for journals is depicted in Figure 1. The boundaries for this systematic review include: (1) Journals that discuss inferiority feelings as either a dependent variable, mediation, or moderating variable; (2) Journals must be in English; (3) Research types may include quantitative, qualitative, experimental, or intervention-based studies (4) Studies published within the last five years, from 2018 to 2024. Journals not meeting these criteria were excluded from the review are: (1) Journals that discussing inferiority feelings in individuals with chronic illnesses (2) Journals that based on characters from books, novels, or films; (3) Research that lacking of clear methodologies and (4) articles classified as reviews, books, or literature review

Figure 1

PRISMA Flow Diagram for Journal Selection
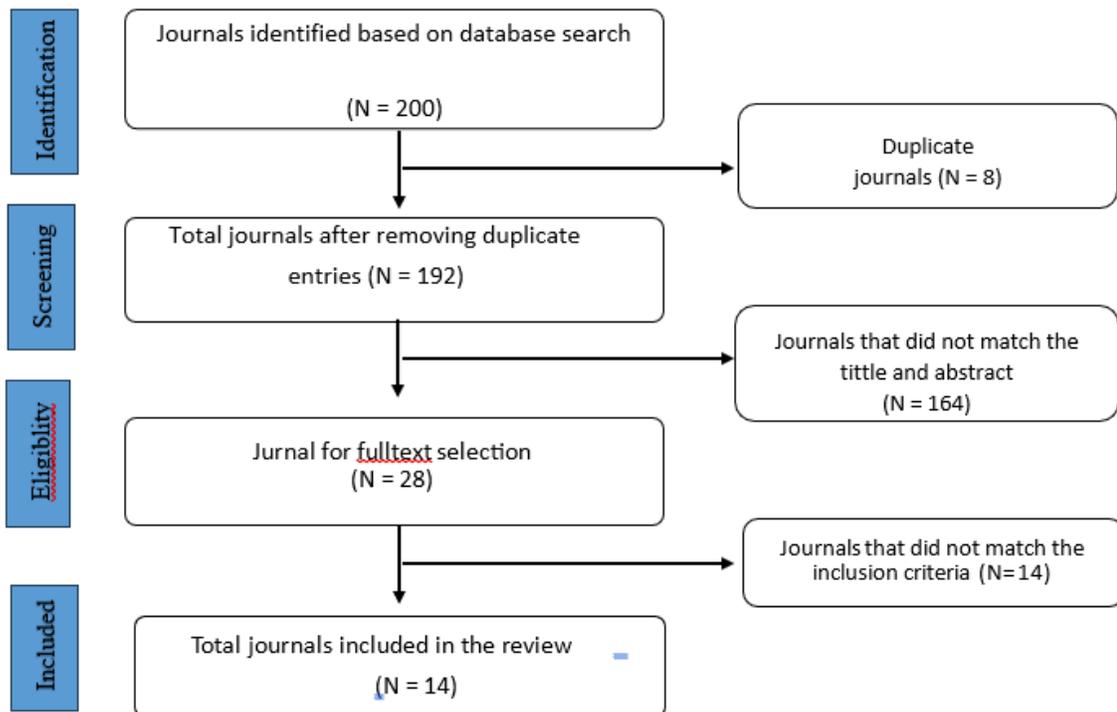
FINDING AND DISCUSSION
RESEARCH RESULT

Inferiority feelings can be understood as an attitude or emotion that is often unrecognized, arising from perceived deficiencies, whether real or imagined (Yusuf in Siahaan, 2019). According to experts, these feelings emerge from the thoughts within an individual's mind, which can be a contributing factor to inferiority feelings in a person. Negative thoughts can negatively influence one's feelings and behaviors. Individuals who feel inferior are often triggered by irrational thinking, leading them to feel inferior compared to others around them. Those experiencing inferiority feelings due to negative thoughts may struggle to build a healthy personality and to develop their creativity, communication skills, and intelligence. This demonstrates the interrelationship between thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

According to Taylor (in Irfan, 2021), inferiority behavior refers to actions by individuals or groups that arise from distorted thinking based on feelings rather than facts. Individuals exhibiting inferiority behavior often feel incapable of accomplishing something without trying first. Children with inferiority behavior tend to be trapped in negative thoughts, which hinder their ability to compete and develop (Sunarti and Purwanti, 2016). Research by Grimaldy, Nirbayaningtyas, and Haryanto (2017) found that 80% of children facing difficulties in personal development exhibit inferiority behavior rooted in negative thinking. Latipun (in Irfan, 2021) also stated that individual behavior, including inferiority behavior, is influenced by thoughts and stimuli from their social environment.

From this explanation, it is evident that various factors influence inferiority feelings in individuals. This systematic review aims to identify these factors as a guideline for understanding the factors that contribute to inferiority feelings in individuals.

Table 1: *List of Factors that cause inferiority feelings*

No	Author	Subject	Influencing Factors	Research Findings
1	Mogaka et al., 2021	400 respondents	Ability Streaming (Grouping)	**Students in low-ability groups tend to feel more inferior.**
2	Kaur, et al., 2013	100 respondents	Parental Education Level	**Children of highly educated parents have lower inferiority feelings compared to those of less educated parents.**
3	Suryanarayana, et al., 2023	400 Respondents	- School Location - Caste - Parental Education	**Individuals attending rural schools and having illiterate parents have higher inferiority feelings.**

4	Yang, H., 2018	351 Respondents	- Living Environment - Gender - Parenting Style	- **Individuals living in rural areas (especially women) have higher inferiority feelings than those in urban areas.** - **Strict and authoritarian parenting styles can lead to inferiority feelings**
5	Shen, et al., 2022	681 Respondents	Social Exclusion	**Individuals experiencing social exclusion have higher inferiority feelings.**
6	Liu, et al., 2022		- Personal Experience - Physical Disabilityand Personality - Romantic Relationship - Competence	- **A lack of skills leads to higher inferiority feelings.** - **Being overweight contributes to higher inferiority feelings.**
7	Norbakhsh, et al., 2022	110 Respondents	Spiritual Intelligence	**Lower levels of spiritual intelligence are associated with higher inferiority feelings.**
8	Dou, et al., 2022	972 Respondents	Body Dissatisfaction	**Body dissatisfaction can increase inferiority feelings.**
9	Choi, et al., 2022	400 Respondents	Contingent Self-Esteem (CSE)	**Self-esteem based on external validation influences inferiority feelings.**
10	Sahin, et al., 2023	390 Respondents	Anxious Attachment	**Individuals with anxious attachment tend to experience higher inferiority feelings.**
11	Akdogan, et al., 2022	241 Respondents	Collectivistic Ambivalence (conflict between individual values and social norms)	**Collectivistic ambivalence increases inferiority feelings in individuals.**
12	Sultana, et al., 2018	773 Respondents	Self-Esteem	**High self-esteem reduces inferiority feelings in individuals.**
13	Ghaniel, et al., 2022	280 Respondents	- Negative Emotional Expression in	- **Families that do not accept individuals contribute to inferiority**

			family	**feelings.**
			- Socioneconomic Status	- **Individuals from low-income families are more likely to experience inferiority feelings.**
			- Low Expectations	
14	Uniyal, et al., 2023	150 Responde nts	**Social Media Use**	**Problematic social media use poses psychological risks that contribute to inferiority feelings.**

The results of the questionnaire about how students' perception towards the implementation of online learning during the covid-19 pandemic is based on their own experiences have previously experienced lecturers with a direct face-to-face learning system and also experienced lectures with online learning. Based on findings, it is indicated that students in the English education program at FKIP Universitas Tanjungpura have a relatively high percentage of perception, which is 70% overall.

This has shown that the majority of students accept online learning and retrieved positive perceptions on the implementation of this online learning. Based on Qiong (2017) positive perception describes all knowledge (both known and unknown) and the responses conveyed when using it. It continues to accept and support the object actively or sensing. while negative perception describes all knowledge (knowing or not knowing) and reactions that are not oriented to the object of perception.

Of the five aspects that obtained the highest percentage was the student achievement aspect (76%). Students have perceived that this online learning has a significant impact on their improvement in academia. These findings are in line with Mandasari (2020) who also revealed that in terms of learning motivation, learning achievement, and learning engagement, online learning has a beneficial effect on students' academic performance. Furthermore, the positive perception that has been shown is from learning completeness. Most students have been able to follow online learning well. From the result obtained, they can easily understand the material provided. These findings are in line with the findings of Siahaan (2021) who has explained that there is a significant effect of online lectures on student understanding which is 37 respondents (74%). A study from Ramadhan (2021) also found that there is a significant effect of online-Based learning on the effectiveness of student learning in Malang.

DISCUSSION

Table 1 highlights several factors that can influence the emergence of inferiority feelings. These factors can be categorized into three groups: internal factors, external factors, and demographic factors. Internal factors include physical disabilities and personality traits, spiritual intelligence, self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, contingent self-esteem (CSE), anxious attachment, collectivistic ambivalence, and low

expectations (Liu et al., 2022; Norbakhsh et al., 2022; Sultana et al., 2018; Dou et al., 2022; Choi et al., 2022; Sahin et al., 2023). External factors consist of ability streaming (grouping), parenting style, social exclusion, and social media use (Mogaka et al., 2021; Yang, H., 2018; Shen et al., 2022; Uniyal et al., 2023). Lastly, demographic factors include living environment, caste, school location, parental education level, gender, and socioeconomic status (Yang, H., 2018; Suryanarayana et al., 2023; Kaur et al., 2013; Socioeconomic Status: Ghaniel et al., 2022).

Internal factors encompass psychological and emotional aspects originating within the individual. Physical disabilities and personality traits, such as dissatisfaction with physical appearance and a tendency toward negative personality traits, can diminish self-confidence. For instance, individuals who feel dissatisfied with their bodies or possess a more sensitive personality prone to criticism are more likely to experience heightened inferiority feelings. Spiritual intelligence plays a crucial role, as individuals unable to find meaning in life tend to have stronger inferiority feelings. Additionally, contingent self-esteem—self-worth dependent on others' evaluations—can exacerbate this condition, especially in the context of social media, which fosters comparison. Anxious attachment is another significant factor, as individuals who feel insecure in interpersonal relationships often experience heightened inferiority feelings. Collectivistic ambivalence creates tension between personal values and social norms, which can amplify inferiority feelings. Low expectations related to achievements also contribute, as individuals who perceive a lack of hope for the future are prone to being trapped in a cycle of worthlessness.

The second factor, external factors, encompasses the social and environmental context in which an individual exists. For example, ability streaming, where students are grouped based on academic ability, can create inferiority feelings, particularly for those placed in lower-performing groups. Parenting style also plays a significant role; a supportive family environment can boost self-esteem, while strict or rejecting parenting styles may lead to inferiority feelings. Social exclusion, where individuals feel marginalized within social groups, often exacerbates inferiority feelings, particularly when individuals become trapped in negative thoughts about such experiences. Moreover, excessive use of social media has emerged as another significant factor, as constant self-comparison with others on these platforms increases psychological pressure and amplifies inferiority feelings.

The third factor, demographic factors, involves elements related to an individual's background, such as living environment, caste, school location, parental education level, gender, and socioeconomic status. The living environment greatly influences access to resources and social support. For instance, individuals raised in areas with strong community support tend to have higher self-esteem. Caste and school location also play crucial roles; students from certain social groups often face stigma, which can heighten inferiority feelings. Parental education level is another contributing factor—children of highly educated parents generally exhibit lower levels of inferiority, while those from less-educated backgrounds may feel more pressured.

Gender can also influence self-perception; for instance, male students often experience greater pressure than females in academic and social contexts. Socioeconomic conditions, including class disparities, affect how individuals compare themselves to their peers, frequently exacerbating inferiority feelings.

CONCLUSION

Inferiority feelings are a complex phenomenon influenced by various factors, namely internal, external, and demographic factors. Internal factors, such as physical disabilities, personality traits, and contingent self-esteem, play a crucial role in shaping an individual's self-perception. On the other hand, external factors, including parenting styles, social exclusion, and social media use, can exacerbate these feelings. Meanwhile, demographic factors, such as living environment, parental education level, and socioeconomic conditions, provide a broader context to an individual's experiences. Therefore, it is essential to create a supportive environment within families and communities to help individuals address and reduce inferiority feelings, enabling them to achieve their full potential and cultivate positive aspirations for the future.

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