

Gender Differences between Assertiveness and Psychological Well Being among University Students

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between Assertiveness and Psychological well being among university students. Data were taken from a sample of 100 university students (50 males and 50 females) with the age range between 19-23 years, using convenience sampling technique. Psychological Well Being Scale (PWBS) developed by Diener et al., 2009 was used to measure the psychological well being whereas The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS) by Nevid and Rathus (1978) was used to measure assertiveness among the students. Data was analyzed via SPSS 20 version. Results showed insignificant gender differences in the levels on assertiveness and psychological well being. Significant correlation was observed between assertiveness and psychological well being, hence proved the hypothesis. Results also indicated no significant differences of family system with assertiveness and psychological well being of the students but in the region of residence, the students exhibited significant differences for assertiveness only and not in the level of psychological well being.

Keywords: Mental health, assertiveness, adolescent, university students.

INTRODUCTION

In our daily lives, peoples' conversation conveyed thoughts and feelings via verbal communication (e.g., use of words) and nonverbal communication (e.g., through body language, voice tone, facial expressions, and bodily actions either by passive, aggressive or assertive style. Usually people employ all three approaches of communication in their conversation and use one approach according to the demand of situation (Pipa & Jaradat, 2010). The adoption of social skills such as successful communication can direct to a more affirmative social sense of self and may determine the student's abilities to succeed in their social peer group (Sarkova, Sleskova, Orosova, Geckova, Katreniakova, Heuvel, & Dijk, 2013). Assertive communication style is considered better as it led to success and minimized the factors which decreased self-achievement and thus enhanced psychological well being (Gumusgul, Goral, Demirel, 2014). The present study investigated the relationship of assertiveness and psychological well being among the students studying in University of Gujrat, Gujrat. Further it has explored the presence of gender differences on these variables.

Assertiveness in a person commonly stands for confident behavior and is considered an approach that a person holds towards others. It is a cognitive mindset of the thoughts and emotions that determined one's communication style. Assertive person behaves in a way that facilitates effective communication, solves problems and strengthens team work (Robbins & Hunsaker, 2009, as cited in Hargie, 2011). It is also a way of communication that conveys needs, views, and emotions as well as respects the rights of others. In this way, it has been differentiated from aggressive behavior which abuses the rights of others and passive behavior where there is no respect for oneself. Therefore, it is a communication style in which person is capable to convey his feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and opinions to others explicitly that doesn't defy other rights (Michel, 2008). Pipa and Jaradat (2010) defined it as

an ability of one's representation towards world, to express feelings, when one feels it necessary. So the ability to give respect and importance to our own rights and others is called assertiveness.

According to Inceoğlu and Aytar, assertiveness is a healthy way of behavior on interpersonal interactions and communications. It can also be described as the individual expressing his feelings, needs, thoughts and protecting his own rights, considering the other people too (as cited in Gumusgul, Goral, & Demirel, 2014). An assertive communication is an awareness about our needs and the way to get them. Therefore, the main objective of assertive communication is not only to be aware of needs and problems but also the effort to solve the problems and get utmost success (Pipa & Jaradat, 2010). This implies an existence of a deep relationship between assertive behavior and wellness.

WHO (2001) has defined optimistic mental health as "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" (as cited in Huppert, 2009). In recent years, Ryff (1989) has proposed a type of wellbeing in addition to subjective wellbeing based on the idea of collective human desires and successful execution towards wellness. This approach was labeled psychological well-being by Diener, Wirtz, Biswas-Diener, Tov, Kim-Prieto, Choi and Oishi (2009).

Huppert (2009) described psychological well-being as living a continuous life combined with feeling good and functioning efficiently which helped to cope with these negative life experiences and as a result maintain the well-being. Ryff (1989) has described six dimensions of psychological wellbeing. Self-acceptance is the first dimension which entailed positive and accepting attitude of a person toward his or her own self. Personal growth referred to a continuous grooming process which broadened human experiences and knowledge. The third dimension is known as purpose in life which denoted to the inspiration for achievement of goals and objectives one has set for him- or herself. Environmental mastery is one's sense of self-efficacy to overcome environmental problems by constructing personally suitable contexts and situations. Autonomy is self-independence by having a strong command on self-regulatory and self-monitoring processes as he or she strive against social norms and assessed himself by personal values and ethical standards. The last one is positive relations with others exhibited by warmth, satisfaction, trusted relations, to care for others by exhibiting love, regard, and tenderness.

Assertive behavior may be used as a supportive tool to maintain social interactions and in result enjoying good emotional wellbeing (Eskin, 2003). Furthermore, those who have grasped assertiveness are better able to diminish interpersonal conflicts in everyday lives, consequently eliminating a major cause of stress (Pipa & Jaradat, 2010). All of the six dimensions as proposed by Ryff (1989) showed qualities of being assertive that result in psychological well-being. Therefore, if a person is assertive, he will have positive attitude toward himself, able to manage a problematic environment, repel group thinking and express strong positive emotions towards others.

Maria (2009) conducted a study to investigate the association between assertiveness and psychological well-being among adult students. 500 adult university students were selected through systematic sampling. Findings of the research showed that there is a significant positive relationship between assertive behavior of students and their psychological well-being. Another study by Sarkova et al, (2013) was conducted to explore the association between assertive behavior of adolescents, psychological well-being and self-esteem on a sample of 1023 adolescent students. Findings revealed that assertiveness was confidently associated with psychological well-being and self-esteem. A similar study by Dogan, Totan,

and Sapmaz (2013) was led to examine the inter-relationship between assertiveness, psychological well-being, and self-esteem. 340 University students (female $n= 213$; male $n= 109$) were selected. Findings indicated an affirmed relationship between assertiveness, psychological well-being, and self-esteem.

In a study Gulsah (2003) investigated the influences of an assertiveness training on the assertiveness, mental health and self-esteem on Children on Grade five. The purpose was to explore the effects on children's level of assertiveness, mental health and self esteem. The results revealed substantial differences between the two groups based on their assertiveness scores. While exploring the effects of assertiveness training on mental wellbeing and self-esteem, results indicated no significant variance among two groups. Conversely, observation recorded on teachers indicated that training added positively to the children's self-esteem and mental well being. Devin, Farbod, Asadi, and Basirat (2013) explored the differences in assertiveness, psychological well-being, and locus of control (LOC) in 193 elderly people and also tried to find out how these variables correlate to each other. Significant correlation was observed between these variables.

In a study by Eskin (2003) cross-cultural comparison of self-stated assertiveness was done in 652 Swedish and 654 Turkish high school students, findings indicated gender difference in conveying thoughts and dealing with personal restrictions where females were found to be more capable. Adolescents who reported high scores in assertiveness have more friends and social supported than the adolescents who were less assertiveness. Powell, and Newgent (2011) conducted a study in which Thirty five mental health professionals were taken as sample who completed a series of inventories. Analyses revealed a significant difference between level of assertiveness and theoretical orientation as action-oriented counselors had significantly higher levels of assertiveness than the insight-oriented counselors.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Based on the review of the literature, the study was designed with the following objectives:

1. To examine gender differences in assertiveness and psychological well-being among university students.
2. To investigate relationship between assertiveness and psychological well-being among university student.
3. To investigate role of socio-demographics in relationship between assertiveness and psychological well-being among university students.

HYPOTHESES

The hypotheses of the research are

H 1: There will be a significant gender difference on score of assertiveness and psychological well-being among university students.

H 2: There will be a relationship between assertiveness and psychological well-being among university students.

H 3: Key demographics (area of residence and family system) will play a role in relationship between assertiveness and psychological well-being among university students.

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The current study aimed to investigate the relationship between assertiveness and psychological well being. Assertiveness is proposed as a factor positively associated with

psychological well being. Issues of students like assertiveness and psychological well being have not gained so much maturity in Pakistan yet. Reviewed literature revealed a need of research on student's assertiveness and psychological wellbeing especially in Pakistan. The findings of the present study have provided a guideline for mental health professionals and counselors especially for those working in college and university settings, that through provision of assertive therapies, they can reduce the aggressiveness and passiveness of the students with behavioral and emotional problems and improved their psychological well being, thereby resulting in uplift of their academic achievements indirectly.

METHOD

A comparative, co-relational research design was used to study the association between assertiveness and psychological wellbeing among male and female university students.

Sample

Students of BS (Hons), University of Gujrat (N=100) were selected through convenience sampling technique. Among them female students (N=50) and male students (N=50) female students. Social sciences students who were doing BS (Hons) including BS 7th and Master 3rd semester with age below 25 were included in the study sample. The rest of the students were excluded from the study.

Instruments

Permission to use required instruments was taken per e-mail from respective authors of the Instruments. English versions of scales were used in present research.

Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS)

Psychological well being scale (Diener et. al., 2009) was used to measure psychological well being of male and female students. PWB is an 8 item scale scored on 7-points Likert scoring ranging from (1 "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"). The reliability coefficient for Psychological wellbeing scale is α .87

The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS)

The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS) is a 30 item scale developed by Nevid and Rathus (1978) to measure Assertiveness. It is a self-report measure to gain insight how assertive a person is. McCormick (1984) has scored this schedule on a 6 point rating with 1 for "very unlike me" to 6 "very much like me" categories with 0.94 reliability.

Demographic Data Sheet:

Apart from the scales demographic information about students' age (years), gender (male/female), father's monthly income (Pakistani rupees in thousands), region of residence (rural/urban), family system (nuclear/joint) was also obtained on demographic data sheet.

Procedure

To collect data from students, prior permission was obtained from head of departments. To check the language difficulty of instruments pilot study was conducted on sample of 10 students (3 male, 7 females) from target population. Convenience sampling technique was used to select study sample. Those students who were agree to participate, was asked to fill the questionnaire and demographic data sheet. Respondents were assured for the confidentiality of their data and requested for careful attention towards questionnaire. Moreover, respondents were requested to provide required information accurately.

Data Analysis

To compute the results, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (20th version) was used. Frequencies and percentages of demographic characteristics of participants were computed. Mean and standard deviation were calculated to see the average scores of adult male and female students on each instrument. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to assess the relationship between key the variables of the study. Independent sample *t*-test was performed to compare means of two groups for gender, region of residence and family system.

RESULTS

The results of the present research are presented below

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (n=100)

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Age		
19-21	59	59
22-23	41	41
Gender		
Male	30	30
Female	70	70
Father's Monthly Income(rupees)		
15-40 thousand	35	35
41-65 thousand	41	41
66-90 thousand and above	24	24
Region of Residence		
Urban	60	60
Rural	40	40
Family System		
Joint	45	45
Nuclear	55	55

Table 1 shows the frequencies and percentages of demographics including students' age, gender, fathers' monthly income, region of residence, and family system.

Table: 2. Mean, Standard Deviation, and Correlation Coefficient of Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS) and Psychological Well Being Scale (PWBS) (N= 100)

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>r</i>
RAS		123.6	15.2	
PWBS	100	42.4	7.0	0.245*

**p* < 0.05

Table 2 shows a significant positive correlation coefficient (*r*= 0.245) between the level of assertiveness and psychological well being among university students.

Table: 3. Comparison of male and female students' score on RAS (Rathus Assertiveness Schedule) and PWB (Psychological Well Being) scale

Measures	<u>Male</u> (N=30)		<u>Female</u> (N=70)		t-value	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
RAS	124.2	11.9	123.3	16.5	.292	.79
PWBS	43.6	7.1	42.1	7.1	.973	.87

Note. $p=n.s$

Table 3 indicate that mean and standard deviation of male and female for assertiveness is 124.2, 11.9 and 123.3, 16.5 respectively, which suggest that there is a difference among male and female on the score of assertiveness. Mean and standard deviation of male and female for psychological well-being is 43.6, 7.1 and 42.1, 7.1 respectively, which suggest that there is a difference among male and female on the score of psychological well-being, while the value of $p= .87$. therefore, these differences are insignificant for assertiveness and psychological well-being among the students.

Table: 4. Comparison of area of residence and family system on RAS (Rathus Assertiveness Schedule) and PWBS (Psychological Well Being scale)

Variables	Area of Residence				t-value	p
	Urban (N=60)		Rural (N=40)			
	M	SD	M	SD		
RAS	121.0	11.9	127.5	18.5	-2.1	0.03
PWBS	42.8	7.3	41.8	6.6	0.7	0.45

Variables	Family System				t-value	p
	Joint (N=45)		Nuclear (N= 55)			
	M	SD	M	SD		
RAS	122.7	12.2	42.9	7.3	-0.5	0.61
PWBS	124.9	17.3	42.0	6.9	-0.6	0.52

* $p < 0.05$; $df=98$

The table 4 revealed that there is no significant association between key demographics (areas of residency and family system) with assertiveness and psychological well-being except in the level of assertiveness ($t= -2.1$; * $p = 0.03$) between the students residing in the urban and rural regions.

DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis of the present study was, "There will be a relationship between assertiveness and psychological well-being among university students". The results of the study showed that a positive significant relationship existed between assertiveness and psychological well-being among university students (see table 2). The findings of the study are consistent with the several researches (Riggio et al, 1993; Maria, 2009; Hassan, Davood, Neda, Maryam, 2013) that showed empirically a strong correlation between psychological wellbeing and assertive social skill.

The second hypothesis of the present study was, “There will be a significant gender difference on score of assertiveness and psychological well-being among university students”. The finding of the research has showed that there are no significant gender differences in the level of assertiveness and psychological well-being among university students (see table 3). Findings are contrary to the view there will be a significant gender difference on score of assertiveness and psychological well-being among university students. These findings are consistent with a study conducted by Eskin (2003) who also found that there would be no difference between genders on assertiveness sense of wellness.

The third hypothesis of the study was, “Key demographic variables (area of residency and family system) will play a significant role in assertiveness and psychological well-being among university students”. Contrary to the view, there was no significant relationship between the key demographic (age, socioeconomic status and family system), assertiveness and psychological well-being among university students except area of residence (see table 4). In accordance with the prevailing cultural value differences in rural and urban areas, it was expected that there will be difference in assertiveness of rural and urban adolescents. This expectation was based on the assertiveness as a behavioral pattern in rural and urban area. The results from the study supported this expectation and found significant relationship between assertiveness and but not for the wellbeing with reference to area. These findings are congruent with a study conducted by Asokan and Muthumanickam (2013) who also stated that rural students are more assertive than urban students. However, the result of insignificant difference in the students’ well-being residing in urban and rural areas is contrary to the findings of the research conducted by Bitz (2012) which stated a high sense of well being in rural students as compared to urban students in colleges.

LIMITATIONS

The following are some limitations that researcher faced in this study:

- i. The generalizability of findings might consider low as the data consisted only of 50 males and 50 females. So the findings of the current research cannot be generalized to the whole population due to small sample size.
- ii. The sample was taken only from university of Gujrat which may not be termed as representative sample of whole population of the university students as there are other university campuses situated in Gujrat.
- iii. The data analysis was correlational, thus not allowed to find out the causal relationships between variables of the study.
- iv. Keeping in mind the depth of the topic the time span was very limited.

SUGGESTIONS

The following are some suggestions researcher wants to give future researchers :

- i. An intensive in depth study is required on wide scale to get more thorough results. The sample should be collected from different educational setups in Gujrat in order to get more generalizability of the results.
- ii. Researcher should control the different variables especially socioeconomic status and family setup in order to have more sound findings for causal relationship exploration.
- iii. Since this was a naïve attempt, further in depth studies can yield valuable results as for instance by conducting a longitudinal study, better understanding of mentioned variables could be obtained.

- iv. The sample size should be large to get more representative and reliable results.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the present study, it can be confirmed that there is a significant positive correlation coefficient ($r= 0.245^*$) between the level of assertiveness and psychological well being among university students. However, there are no significant differences among male and female on the scores of psychological well-being and assertiveness. In addition, there are no significant association between key demographics (areas of residency and family system) with assertiveness and psychological well-being except in the level of assertiveness between the students residing in the urban and rural regions.

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