



A Study of Assertiveness, Mindfulness, and Psychological Wellbeing: A Cross-Cultural Examination of Mizo and Khasi College Students

Martin Lallawmsiama Ralte*
Sabiha Alam Choudhury†
Latreia B. Riwan‡

Abstract

The distinctive social fabric of Mizo and Khasi societies, marked by their contrasting patrilineal and matrilineal traditions, offers profound insights into the interplay of assertiveness, mindfulness, and psychological well-being among college students, prompting an exploration into how gender and ethnicity shape these attributes within these communities. A convenience sampling was used for the study and the sample comprised of 240 college students. The Rathus Assertiveness Scale (RAS), the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) and the Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWS) were used to collect data. Findings reveal significant and positive associations between assertiveness, mindfulness, and psychological well-being, except in Mizo females where the assertiveness-psycho well-being link is non-significant. Hierarchical regression analysis indicates that assertiveness and mindfulness significantly predict psychological well-being in males from both ethnic groups, while in females, assertiveness predicts psychological well-being for Khasi students, and mindfulness emerges as a significant predictor for both Mizo and Khasi females. Gender significantly influences mindfulness, while ethnicity affects all three variables. The interaction effect of gender and ethnicity is significant for assertiveness. This study underscores the need for tailored mental health interventions, acknowledging the influence of gender and ethnicity on psychological attributes among college students, thus promoting more inclusive and effective well-being programs.

*Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Mizoram University, Aizawl, Mizoram, India. Email: martin.lls.ralte@gmail.com

†Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Mizoram University, Aizawl, Mizoram, India. Email: sabihachoudhury9@gmail.com

‡PG Student, Department of Applied Psychology, Pondicherry University. Email: riwanlatreia17@gmail.com

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Introduction

Assertiveness has evolved as a multifaceted concept involving the recognition and expression of emotions (Salter, 1949), protection of individual rights and the development of self-fulfilment (Alberti & Emmons, 1974). Its interpretation varies across cultures and contexts, emphasizing the need to consider cultural and situational factors (Furnham, 1979). Assertiveness as a contributor to psychological wellbeing had been extensively researched. Sarkova et al. (2013) found that anxiety was associated with reduced participation in assertive situations, but adolescents displaying assertive behaviors had higher levels of psychological well-being and self-esteem. Additionally, Pourjali and Zarnaghash (2010) emphasized the importance of the ability to say 'No', noting its positive association with better mental health, with no significant gender differences.

Mindfulness is an awareness of one's internal states and surroundings emphasizing attentive presence in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2009). This practice encourages individuals to focus their attention on the present, without passing critical judgments, allowing them to observe their internal and external world with curiosity and openness. Rooted in ancient spiritual traditions like Buddhism, mindfulness has found its way into Western psychology and medicine, offering valuable tools for promoting psychological well-being. Keng et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of existing researches and they discovered that the majority of the studies they examined consistently indicated that mindfulness had a beneficial influence on individuals. Their analysis concluded that mindfulness yielded a range of positive psychological effects, such as heightened subjective well-being, diminished psychological symptoms and emotional reactivity, and enhanced behavioural self-regulation.

Mindfulness is also seen to have an association with assertiveness. Belen (2021) stated that mindfulness contributes to greater levels of assertiveness which in turn leads to higher psychological wellbeing. Persons with greater self-awareness are able to express their thoughts and opinions assertively while maintaining consideration for their conversation partner. They are mindful of their choice of words and the impact it will have on the other (Weliangan, 2022). In a related vein, Jones and Hansen (2014) stated that mindfulness helps individuals reflect on their own behaviour and emotion in interpersonal interaction. Among the various populations that can benefit from assertiveness and mindfulness are the college students. Enhancing assertiveness among college students can empower them to effectively express themselves, navigate interpersonal relationships, and advocate for their rights and needs (Canter & Canter, 2001). Mindfulness is beneficial for students as it helps improve cognitive and emotional processes, such as attention, concentration, working memory, and stress reduction, thereby indirectly contributing to better academic performance. It also helps in emotion regulation (Alomari, 2023).

The present study aims to explore how assertiveness, mindfulness and psychological wellbeing relate to each other among Mizo and Khasi college students of Mizoram and

Meghalaya. Additionally, it endeavours to understand how gender and ethnicity might influence these psychological attributes. The distinctive social landscapes of Mizo and Khasi societies, shaped by their contrasting patrilineal and matrilineal traditions, provide an intriguing backdrop for our research. The importance of delving into the ethnic and cultural subtleties of assertiveness and mindfulness is further emphasized by scholars such as Furnham (1979), who highlight how cultural and situational contexts can significantly shape the perception, expression, and acceptance of assertive behavior. Kirmayer (2015) suggests that the incorporation of mindfulness into education and other domains may be subject to cultural norms and expectations, emphasizing the necessity for a culturally sensitive approach.

Objectives

- a) Investigate the relationship between assertiveness, mindfulness, and psychological wellbeing.
- b) Assess the predictive role of assertiveness and mindfulness on psychological wellbeing.
- c) Examine the influence of gender and ethnicity on assertiveness, mindfulness, and psychological wellbeing.

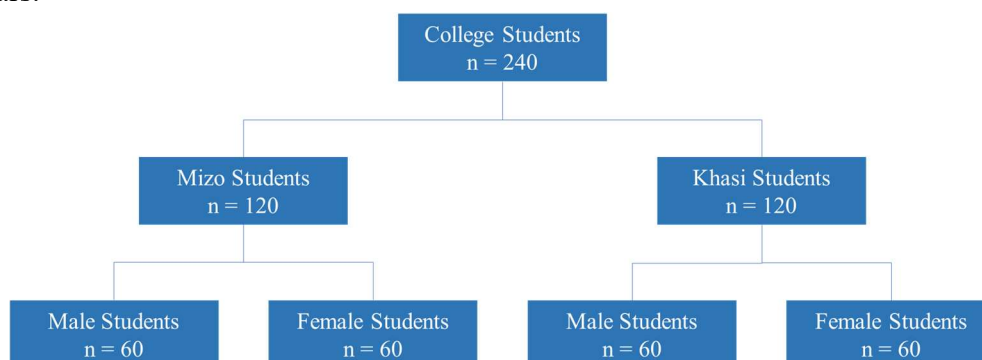
Hypothesis

- 1) There will be significant positive association between assertiveness, mindfulness and psychological wellbeing.
- 2) Assertiveness and mindfulness will positively predict psychological wellbeing.
- 3) There will be significant gender and ethnic based differences in the measures of assertiveness, mindfulness, and psychological wellbeing.

Methods and Procedures

Sample

The study employed a convenience sampling method and consisted of 240 college students from the regions of Mizoram and Meghalaya. The sample was categorized by both gender and ethnicity, resulting in four groups: 60 Khasi males, 60 Khasi females, 60 Mizo males, and 60 Mizo females. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 24 years, with an average age of 20.6 years.



Design of the Study

The study utilized a 2 x 2 factorial design to determine the association between assertiveness, mindfulness, and psychological wellbeing and to explore the effects of gender, ethnicity.

Procedure

In this study, data was collected through direct interactions with participants, ensuring informed consent and clear instructions. In adherence to American Psychological Association's (APA's) Ethics Code, prior permission for the research was obtained from the relevant institutional authorities. Informed consent was sought from all participants, ensuring they were fully briefed about the study's objectives, procedures, and potential risks before voluntarily agreeing to participate. Confidentiality of participant data was rigorously maintained throughout the study, with all information anonymized and securely stored to prevent unauthorized access. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions. Additionally, measures were taken to minimize any potential harm or discomfort to participants, and ethical considerations were paramount in every stage of data collection and analysis.

Measures

The following tools were used to achieve the objectives:

a) *Rathus Assertiveness Scale (RAS) (Rathus, 1973)*

The RAS is a 30-item scale developed by Rathus (1973) to measure assertiveness. It is a self-report inventory that is scored on a 6-point likert rating from 'very much like me' to 'very much unlike me'. The schedule exhibits reliable test-retest ($r = .78$; $p < .01$) and split-half ($r = .77$; $p < .01$) reliability, ranging from moderate to high levels.

b) *Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) (Brown & Ryan, 2003)*

MAAS (Brown & Ryan, 2003) is a 15-item, 6-point Likert-type scale designed to measure the extent to which individuals pay attention during several tasks. The MAAS does not require familiarity with meditation. The Scale has shown good psychometric properties with a cronbach's alpha of .89.

c) *The Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWS) (Ryff, 1989)*

The PWB consist of a series of statements reflecting the six areas of psychological well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Respondents rate statements on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 6 indicating strong agreement. The scale proved to be reliable in various populations.

Results and Interpretation

The primary objectives of the study were to investigate the association and the variations in assertiveness, mindfulness, and well-being among college students, specifically examining the influence of ethnicity and gender. The RAS, the MAAS, and the PWS were used to collect data. The data were then checked for parametric test assumptions and homogeneity of variance was ensured through Levene's test, and the resulting data was analyze using SPSS.

Cronbach's alpha (α) was used to assess the reliability of the scales. In the case of the RAS, four items were removed to enhance internal consistency. As a result, Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.71 to 0.87 across various gender and ethnic groups, indicating good to very good internal consistency. The MAAS exhibited strong internal consistency, with alpha values ranging from 0.70 to 0.92. However, the PWS initially displayed slightly lower internal consistency. To address this, four items were removed, leading to an increase in alpha values from 0.66 to 0.74. This adjustment improved the overall reliability of the scale.

Table 1: Psychometric properties of the Behavioural Measures

	Mizo		Khasi	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<i>Rathus Assertiveness Scale</i>				
Cronbach Alpha	0.87	0.76	0.71	0.74
Mean	94.4	85.8	100	101
Standard deviation	18.3	13.1	13.7	16.1
Skewness	-0.21	-0.27	-1.05	0.64
Kurtosis	1.82	0.16	1.41	0.17
<i>Mindful Attention Awareness Scale</i>				
Cronbach Alpha	0.70	0.75	0.73	0.92
Mean	53.3	50.0	58.9	56.1
Standard deviation	8.58	9.91	9.04	15.5
Skewness	0.68	-0.40	0.68	-0.01
Kurtosis	0.54	-0.13	0.19	-0.62
<i>Psychological Well-being Scale</i>				
Cronbach Alpha	0.74	0.71	0.66	0.72
Mean	81.9	81.6	85.3	87.1
Standard deviation	13.3	10.7	11.2	12.2
Skewness	0.25	-0.36	0.31	0.48
Kurtosis	0.46	0.03	0.23	-0.46

Pearsons's correlation was conducted to examine the relationships between behavioural measures, specifically the RAS, MAAS, and PWB. These measures are categorized by gender and ethnicity, with a focus on two ethnic groups: Mizo and Khasi (Table 2). Within the Mizo ethnic group, the results show gender-specific correlations. For Mizo males, there is a significant positive correlation between assertiveness and mindfulness ($r = .579, p < 0.01$), as well as between assertiveness and psychological wellbeing ($r = .413, p < 0.01$). Additionally, a significant positive correlation is observed between mindfulness and psychological wellbeing ($r = .533, p < 0.01$). However, for Mizo females, a significant association was only seen between mindfulness and psychological wellbeing ($r = .320, p < 0.05$). Among the Khasi ethnic group, similar gender-specific patterns are observed. Khasi males display significant positive correlations between assertiveness and mindfulness ($r = .545, p < 0.01$), assertiveness and psychological wellbeing ($r = .328, p < 0.01$), and mindfulness and psychological wellbeing ($r = .476, p < 0.01$). Likewise, Khasi females exhibit significant positive

correlations between assertiveness and mindfulness ($r = .619, p < 0.01$), assertiveness and psychological wellbeing ($r = .408, p < 0.01$), and mindfulness and psychological wellbeing ($r = .560, p < 0.01$). These results indicate that the relationships between assertiveness, mindfulness, and psychological wellbeing are statistically significant for both genders within the Khasi ethnic group.

Table 2: Correlational Matrix of the behavioural measures used in the study categorized by gender and ethnicity

		Male			Female		
		RAS	MAAS	PWB	RAS	MAAS	PWB
Mizo	RAS	1			1		
	MAAS	.579**	1		.215	1	
	PWB	.413**	.533**	1	.235	.302*	1
Khasi	RAS	1			1		
	MAAS	.545**	1		.619**	1	
	PWB	.328**	.476**	1	.408**	.560**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed) * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed)

Note: RAS = Rathus Assertiveness Scale; MAAS = Mindful Attention Awareness Scale; PWB = Psychological Wellbeing Scale

Hierarchical regression analyses (Table 3) were performed, categorized by gender and ethnicity. For males, assertiveness significantly predicted psychological wellbeing in the initial step, for both Mizo and Khasi. In Mizo male assertiveness ($\beta = 0.41, p = 0.001$) explained 15% of variance, while in Khasi male assertiveness ($\beta = 0.32, p = 0.01$) explained 9% of the variance. Mindfulness became a significant predictor in the second step for both Mizo ($\beta = 0.44, p = 0.002$) and Khasi males ($\beta = 0.42, p = 0.003$), increasing explained variance to 27% and 20%, respectively. However, assertiveness lost significance in the second step for both ethnicities. Among females, assertiveness was a significant predictor only for Khasi in the initial step ($\beta = 0.40, p = 0.001$), explaining 15% of variance. In the second step, mindfulness significantly predicted psychological wellbeing for both Mizo ($\beta = 0.26, p = 0.04$) and Khasi females ($\beta = 0.49, p = 0.001$), increasing variance explained to 9% and 29%, respectively.

Table 3: Hierarchical regression analysis testing the predictability of Psychological Wellbeing from Assertiveness and Mindfulness categorized by gender and ethnicity

Gender	Ethnicity	Model	B	SE B	β	t	Sig.
Male	Mizo	1 (Constant)	45.2	5.98		7.55	.000
		Assertiveness	.266	.077	.413	3.45	.001
		2 (Constant)	26.3	8.02		3.27	.002
		Assertiveness	.100	.087	.156	1.14	.256
		Mindfulness	.590	.181	.443	3.26	.002

Gender	Ethnicity	Model	B	SE B	β	t	Sig.
	Khasi	1 (Constant)	50.9	7.10		7.17	.000
		Assertiveness	.229	.087	.328	2.64	.011
		2 (Constant)	36.9	8.06		4.58	.000
		Assertiveness	.068	.097	.098	.705	.484
	Mizo	Mindfulness	.457	.150	.422	3.05	.003
		1 (Constant)	52.7	6.92		7.62	.000
		Assertiveness	.185	.100	.235	1.84	.071
		2 (Constant)	42.1	8.46		4.98	.000
Female	Khasi	Assertiveness	.140	.100	.178	1.40	.167
		Mindfulness	.273	.131	.264	2.07	.043
		1 (Constant)	50.7	6.10		8.31	.000
		Assertiveness	.250	.074	.408	3.40	.001
	Khasi	(Constant)	48.8	5.59		8.72	.000
		2 Assertiveness	.061	.085	.099	.715	.478
		Mindfulness	.310	.086	.498	3.58	.001

For Mizo male, $\Delta R^2 = 0.15$ for step 1 and $\Delta R^2 = 0.27$ for step 2; For Khasi male, $\Delta R^2 = 0.09$ for step 1 and $\Delta R^2 = 0.20$ for step 2; For Mizo female, $\Delta R^2 = 0.03$ for step 1 and $\Delta R^2 = 0.09$ for step 2

For Khasi female, $\Delta R^2 = 0.15$ for step 1 and $\Delta R^2 = 0.29$ for step 2

A 2-way ANOVA was conducted to see the effect of gender and ethnicity on assertiveness, mindfulness and psychological wellbeing. Gender effect was observed only in mindfulness scores ($F = 4.39$, $p = 0.03$), indicating that males and females had different levels of mindfulness. However, there were no significant gender differences in assertiveness and psychological wellbeing. Further, Ethnicity was seen to influence assertiveness ($F = 22.8$, $p = .031$) and mindfulness ($F = 16.7$, $p = .023$). Lastly, the interaction between gender and ethnicity had a significant impact only on assertiveness scores ($F = 5.14$, $p = 0.024$).

Table 4: Two-Way ANOVA (2 gender X 2 ethnicity) on RAS, MAAS and PWB

Source	Dependent Variables	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Gender	RAS	792.06	1	792.067	3.40	.066
	MAAS	546.017	1	546.017	4.39	.037
	PWB	40.838	1	40.838	0.38	.536
Ethnicity	RAS	5320.417	1	5320.417	22.8	.031
	MAAS	2076.817	1	2076.817	16.7	.023
	PWB	1485.038	1	1485.038	13.9	.051
Gender * Ethnicity	RAS	1197.067	1	1197.067	5.14	.024
	MAAS	3.750	1	3.750	0.03	.862
	PWB	51.338	1	51.338	0.48	.488

Interpretation

The present study aimed to look into the association between the behavioural measures of assertiveness, mindfulness and psychological wellbeing. The result indicated positive associations between assertiveness, mindfulness, and psychological wellbeing within Mizo and Khasi males, as well as among Khasi females. These findings corroborate the research conducted by Sarkova et al. (2013), and Belen (2021), which identified significant relationships between assertiveness and psychological and mental wellbeing. Moreover, our study found a significant positive correlation between mindfulness and psychological wellbeing, aligning with the results of a study by Sampath et al. (2019), which indicated that mindfulness is linked to reduced levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, thus fostering psychological wellbeing.

Furthermore, our findings are in accordance with previous investigations by Belen (2021), and Weliangan (2022), underscoring that mindfulness positively influences assertiveness, thereby enhancing self-expression and communication skills. However, among Mizo females, a significant association was observed only between mindfulness and psychological wellbeing.

The present study aimed to explore the predictability of psychological wellbeing from assertiveness and mindfulness among the Mizo and Khasi population. Result indicates several significant findings. Assertiveness and mindfulness were significant predictors of psychological wellbeing for males in both groups, whereas among females, assertiveness was a significant predictor only for Khasi students, with mindfulness emerging as a significant predictor for both Mizo and Khasi females. Plantade-Gipch et al. (2023) found that assertiveness significantly predicted emerging adults' well-being. Sarkova et al. (2013) also reported that assertiveness predicted students' psychological wellbeing and self-esteem.

Consistent with the research conducted by Klainin-Yobas et al. (2016), the present study corroborates the role of mindfulness as a predictor of psychological wellbeing. Klainin-Yobas et al. (2016) advocate for mindfulness training as a potential means to enhance the psychological wellbeing of students. Furthermore, the comparative study conducted by Baer et al. (2012) involving mindfulness practitioners and non-practitioners revealed that the former exhibited higher levels of psychological wellbeing.

The current study identified an interaction effect between gender and ethnicity on assertiveness, aligning with prior research by Das and Shah (2013) and Shafiq et al. (2015), which observed gender-based differences in assertiveness, and supporting the findings of Larsen and Jordan (2017), who underscored the impact of culture and ethnicity on the perception, expression, and acceptance of assertive behavior. In a study conducted by Kang et al. (2018), significant gender differences were observed in response to a mindfulness intervention, indicating that female students experienced more substantial enhancements in positive affect compared to those in the control group, suggesting the necessity for tailored training programs for male and female students. Furthermore, our current research identified

that both gender and ethnicity had significant main effects on mindfulness, underscoring the importance of considering these factors in mindfulness interventions.

The current study indicated the absence of a significant interaction effect between gender and caste on psychological well-being, which aligns with Hori's (2010) findings, suggesting that distinctive gender roles contribute to stress and anxiety. Moreover, it underscores the intricate influence of culture and contextual factors on mental health and findings in this area have been inconsistent, particularly regarding the impact of culture and contextual factors.

Conclusion

In this study we investigated the associations between assertiveness, mindfulness, and psychological well-being among the Mizo and Khasi college students. The findings consistently demonstrated positive associations between assertiveness, mindfulness, and psychological well-being, aligning with previous researches. The study also explores the gender and ethnic distinctions. Effect of gender was observed in mindfulness scores, while ethnicity had significant effect on assertiveness and mindfulness. Interaction effect of gender and ethnicity was observed only on assertiveness scores.

Scope of the Study

Despite these limitations, this study significantly contributes to the literature by offering a comprehensive exploration of assertiveness, mindfulness, and psychological well-being within a specific cultural context. By focusing on college students from Mizoram and Meghalaya, the study provides nuanced insights into the interplay of these psychological constructs, enriching our understanding of mental health dynamics in diverse populations.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the associations between assertiveness, mindfulness, and psychological well-being among college students in Mizoram and Meghalaya, several limitations should be acknowledged. The use of convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of findings, and reliance on self-report measures introduces potential biases. Additionally, the homogeneity of the sample in terms of demographic factors may restrict the breadth of conclusions.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this research have important implications for mental health interventions and educational initiatives targeting college students. By recognizing the influence of gender and ethnicity on assertiveness and mindfulness, policymakers and educators can develop tailored interventions to promote psychological well-being. Moreover, the study underscores the need for future research employing longitudinal designs and diverse sampling methods to further elucidate these relationships and inform evidence-based interventions aimed at enhancing mental health outcomes among college students.

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