

## 05 ORIGINAL RESEARCH

# A Drill-down Analysis of Psychological Well-Being Among Asian Students from India, Thailand, and Vietnam: A Cross-sectional, Cross-cultural, Comparative Study

Raul Calderon Jr.

*Former Visiting Professor, Faculty of Sports Science, Kasetsart University, Thailand*

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Research on psychological well-being (PWB) has increased over the last 3 decades. Results from multicultural studies have reported significant gender, age, and group differences in PWB among subjects from different countries/cultures. However, there are major limitations common among these multicultural studies, i.e., (1) a lack of a well-defined or operationalized construct for PWB, (2) in-depth cross-cultural comparisons in levels of PWB, and (3) limited data on student populations.

**Purpose:** This study aimed: (1) to use a six-dimension theory-based model of PWB to describe levels of PWB in Asian university students and (2) compare differences in PWB among Asian university students from India, Thailand, and Vietnam.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional research design was applied with undergraduate students (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> year) from India (N=508), Thailand (N=1132), and Vietnam (N=1821). The six universities (1 from India, 2 from Thailand, and 3 from Vietnam) ranged in size (smallest <1000 and largest >10,000), type (private and public), and specialization (public health, sports, humanities, and technology). Students completed an online or paper survey in a classroom setting from October 2016-December 2017. The survey included demographic questions and the 54-item Ryff scales of psychological well-being (RSPWB), which consists of six subscales (1. autonomy, 2. environmental mastery, 3. purpose in life, 4. positive relations, 5. personal growth, and 6. self-acceptance), with 9-items per scale, and contains a six-point Likert scale (from 1=Strongly Disagree to 6=Strongly Agree). A composite PWB score (sum of all subscales) was also calculated for each country. Data were analyzed using univariate, bivariate, ANOVA, and Post Hoc statistics on SPSS (2019).

**Results:** The highest and lowest subscale scores for each country are as follows: India, autonomy (X=33.92, SD=5.58)-personal growth (X=30.73, SD=4.97); Thailand, positive relations (X=37.67, SD=6.72)-autonomy (X=32.86, SD=4.84); Vietnam, self-acceptance (X=33.88, SD=4.60)-purpose in life (X=32.20,

SD=5.70). Thailand had the highest composite PWB score ( $X=215.71$ ,  $SD=25.10$ ) and India the lowest ( $X=196.36$ ,  $SD=16.81$ ). ANOVA and Post Hoc results showed that Thailand had significantly higher subscale and PWB scores ( $p < 0.05$ ) compared to Vietnam and India in all subscales, except autonomy. India had a significantly higher subscale score ( $p < 0.05$ ) in autonomy compared to Thailand and Vietnam. Overall, Thailand had the highest subscale scores followed by Vietnam and then India.

**Conclusion:** Based on the analysis, we conclude that scores on the six dimensions (autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, positive relations, personal growth, and self-acceptance) of the RSPWB vary in strength and rank in university students from India, Thailand, and Vietnam. Moreover, the data also indicates that significant differences exist in the six dimensions and composite scores of PWB between university students from the three countries studied.

**Discussion:** To the best of our knowledge, this is the first in-depth cross-cultural study on PWB among university students from India, Thailand, and Vietnam using a theory-based construct to document variations and patterns in PWB and its corresponding six dimensions. The results indicate that the relative strength and rank/order of the six dimensions (autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, positive relations, personal growth, and self-acceptance) varies within Asian countries. Moreover, as importantly, the results further indicate that the strength and rank/order of PWB and its corresponding six dimensions also varies by country. These findings have important implications, i.e., (1) descriptive data from this study can be used for comparative purposes by researchers conducting cross-cultural research, (2) individual significance of the six dimensions of PWB can be further studied to determine the role that each dimension plays, if any, in the overall development of students, (3) develop statistical models to test potential factors responsible for the PWB differences among students and countries, and (4) develop and test intervention strategies to increase/improve the PWB of university students. One limitation of this study is that the population was restricted to undergraduate students, thus these findings may not generalize to other adult populations.

## Author Information

**Raul Calderon Jr. Ph.D.**, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7580-3057>

Former Visiting Professor, Faculty of Sports Science, Kasetsart University, Thailand & Executive Advisor, International Organization of Health, Sports, and Kinesiology (IOHKS), USA.

Email: [raulthedoc@gmail.com](mailto:raulthedoc@gmail.com)



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