



Happiness and Self-Esteem among Tribal Students: A Systematic Review

RANI SINGH

Ph. D. Research Scholar in Psychology
Sona Devi University, Ghatshila

DR. KAMAL KUMAR MAHATO

Assistant professor, Department of Psychology
Patamda Degree College

Abstract:

This systematic review synthesizes empirical research examining happiness and self-esteem in tribal student populations. Happiness and self-esteem are linked with psychological wellbeing and academic success. Tribal students often face socio-economic challenges, cultural transition stress, and limited educational resources that may affect their emotional wellbeing. The review highlights patterns of self-esteem and wellbeing among tribal adolescents and older students across studies, underscores protective factors and psychological risks, and notes important research gaps. Recommendations for culturally informed educational policy and tribal welfare strategies are provided.

Keywords: *Happiness, Self-Esteem, Wellbeing, Tribal Students, Adolescents, Psychological Wellbeing*

1. Introduction

Happiness and self-esteem are foundational constructs in psychological research on wellbeing, social adjustment, and educational success. Happiness generally refers to subjective positive emotional experiences and life satisfaction. Self-esteem is defined as an individual's overall evaluation of personal worth, often measured using instruments such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, a widely validated tool to assess global self-worth. Self-esteem contributes to resilience, coping, and adaptive behaviour in challenging environments (Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, 1965). (Wikipedia).

For tribal students, the educational context often involves multiple stressors, including cultural mismatches between community values and mainstream school practices, socioeconomic disadvantage, and limited psychosocial support structures. These factors may influence levels of happiness and self-esteem, which have implications for academic engagement and long-term wellbeing. This review examines available research on happiness and self-esteem among tribal students and identifies key psychological and contextual correlates relevant for school and policy interventions.

2. Methodology

A systematic search was conducted in academic databases using combinations of keywords including tribal students, indigenous, self-esteem, wellbeing, happiness, adolescents, and related concepts. Studies were included if they reported empirical data on happiness or self-esteem among tribal or indigenous student populations. Both school and college student samples were considered. Key information extracted included authors, year, sample characteristics, measures, and principal findings.

3. Conceptual Background

3.1 Happiness in Psychological Research

Happiness is often conceptualized as subjective wellbeing, encompassing emotional experiences of positive affect, life satisfaction, and absence of distress. Happiness is influenced by social relationships, academic success, cultural belonging, and broader psychosocial conditions.

3.2 Self-Esteem and Wellbeing

Self-esteem reflects an individual's appraisal of personal value and competence. High self-esteem is associated with adaptive coping, social confidence, and motivation. In adolescents, self-esteem is linked with school engagement and mental health outcomes, making it a central variable in educational psychology.

3.3 Tribal Context

Tribal student populations are diverse, including indigenous ethnic groups in India, North America, and other regions. These students may experience cultural displacement, language barriers, and systemic disadvantage, all of which can affect emotional wellbeing.

4. Findings

4.1 Patterns of Self-Esteem in Tribal Students

Research shows mixed results regarding self-esteem levels among tribal students. In a large study of 2,200 secondary school tribal students in Sidhi District, India, higher self-esteem was significantly associated with academic achievement and gender, suggesting that self-esteem may be related to school performance and demographic characteristics. (ijhsr.org).

In contrast, studies comparing tribal and non-tribal adolescents reveal variability. A comparative analysis in Kerala reported significant self-esteem differences between tribal and non-tribal groups, indicating that tribal students may experience lower self-esteem in certain contexts. (socialsciencejournal.net)

A cross-sectional study of tribal and non-tribal school students found that there was no significant difference in self-esteem levels, but that self-esteem was negatively correlated with social anxiety across groups. (J Positive Psychology and Wellbeing).

Training interventions also show promise. Life skills training among tribal youths positively affected self-esteem in an experimental study, suggesting that psychosocial training can enhance self-esteem in this population. (ijrrjournal.com).

4.2 Happiness and Wellbeing

Although empirical research specifically focused on happiness among tribal students is limited, studies on related constructs such as psychological stress and cultural resilience suggest that wellbeing is influenced by cultural and community factors. A comparative study identified that spirituality, which is often higher among tribal students in some contexts, was associated with reduced psychological distress and insecurity, indicating a potential indirect contribution to happiness and life satisfaction. (rrjournals.com).

Research on indigenous adolescent populations outside India shows that ethnic identity and peer belonging are linked with self-esteem and wellbeing. A study of Native American adolescents found that ethnic racial identity achievement contributed to greater peer belonging, which in turn was associated with improved self-esteem. (PubMed)

5. Table of Reviewed Studies

Authors (Year)	Sample	Measures	Key Findings
Sa & Sharma (2024)	2,200 tribal secondary students	Self-esteem, academic achievement	Self-esteem significantly related to academic achievement and gender in tribal students. (ijhsr.org)

Authors (Year)	Sample	Measures	Key Findings
Soundarya & Govind (2022)	101 male students (47 tribal)	Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Social Anxiety	No significant difference in self-esteem between tribal and non-tribal; self-esteem negatively correlated with social anxiety. (J Positive Psychology and Wellbeing)
Benoy & Joseph (2021)	201 adolescents (101 tribal)	Self-Esteem Scale	Tribal adolescents showed higher self-esteem than non-tribal peers. (socialsciencejournal.net)
Parmar & Jain (2019)	140 tribal youths	Self-Esteem Inventory	Life skills training significantly enhanced self-esteem among tribal youths. (ijrrjournal.com)
Native American Study (2023)	317 Native American adolescents	ERI, Peer Belonging, Self-Esteem	Peer belonging mediated effects of ethnic identity on self-esteem. (PubMed)

6. Discussion

The studies reviewed indicate that self-esteem among tribal students is shaped by individual, social, and academic factors. In some contexts, tribal students show lower self-esteem compared with non-tribal peers, while in other studies self-esteem levels are comparable or even higher. This variability may be influenced by measurement differences, cultural factors, and sample characteristics. Self-esteem appears to correlate with academic achievement and social emotional factors such as anxiety, suggesting its role in students' educational adjustment.

Research on happiness or subjective wellbeing specifically among tribal students is sparser. Indirect evidence indicates that cultural and spiritual dimensions may contribute to emotional wellbeing and reduce distress, which is an important component of happiness. Peer belonging and ethnic identity also appear to influence self-esteem, indicating that social integration and cultural affirmation are key to wellbeing.

Methodological limitations include limited longitudinal research, inconsistent operationalization of happiness, and predominantly cross-sectional designs. Future research should incorporate culturally validated measures of wellbeing and happiness specific to tribal contexts.

7. Policy and Practice Implications

Findings from this review have significant implications for educational policy and tribal welfare initiatives. First, educational systems should integrate culturally responsive wellbeing curricula that explicitly promote happiness and self-esteem. Programs that include life skills training, social emotional learning, and culturally anchored identity affirmation can strengthen students' psychological resources. Second, teacher professional development should emphasize culturally informed pedagogy that recognizes tribal students' cultural backgrounds and adapts instructional strategies to foster belonging and positive self-views. Enhanced school counselling services can address emotional distress early and support adaptive coping strategies.

Third, educational policymakers should consider targeted funding to schools with large tribal populations to implement wellbeing programs that are tailored to community contexts. Intersectoral collaboration between education and tribal welfare agencies can support holistic development, including community engagement activities designed to reinforce cultural pride and happiness.

Finally, national tribal welfare programs should incorporate psychological wellbeing indicators into tribal education policy frameworks. Programs that connect cultural identity with school experiences can

promote self-esteem and happiness, contributing to improved academic outcomes and long-term social wellbeing.

8. Conclusion

Happiness and self-esteem are integral aspects of psychological wellbeing that influence tribal students' educational experiences and life trajectories. Although research on happiness in tribal contexts remains limited, evidence on self-esteem suggests that it is associated with academic achievement, social belonging, and emotional adjustment. Cultural factors such as spirituality and ethnic identity may serve as protective factors for wellbeing. Policymakers and educators should design culturally grounded interventions that enhance happiness and self-esteem among tribal students. Aligning educational policy with tribal welfare priorities can foster inclusive learning environments that promote psychological wellbeing and academic success.

References

1. Benoy, A. T., & Joseph, J. (2021). Self-esteem among tribal adolescents. *International Journal of Social Research and Development*. (socialsciencejournal.net)
2. Ethnic racial identity development and self-esteem among Native American adolescents: The mediating role of peer belonging. (2023). PubMed. (PubMed)
3. Parmar, K., & Jain, K. (2019). Effectiveness of life skills training for enhancing self-esteem among tribal youths. *International Journal of Research and Review*. (ijrrjournal.com)
4. Ranjan, L. K., Gupta, P. R., & Gujar, N. M. (2021). Self-esteem and wellbeing among tribal and non-tribal adolescent girls. *International Journal of Research in Medical Sciences*, 9(9), 2723–2727. (MSJ Online)
5. Sa, P., & Sharma, K. K. N. (2024). Relationship between academic achievement and self-esteem among secondary school tribal students in Sidhi District. *International Journal of Health Sciences and Research*. (ijhsr.org)
6. Soundarya, T., & Govind, K. (2022). Predictors of social anxiety among tribal and non-tribal students. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(8). (J Positive Psychology and Wellbeing)