

AFFECTIVE STATE OF ETHNIC COMMUNITY AS RELATED TO GENDER AND MARITAL STATUS

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Abstract

The study was aimed at understanding the affective state of Bangladeshi ethnic community in relation to gender and marital status. Towards this end, positive and negative affects of 103 adult indigenous persons were measured. Analysis of data in multiple regressions demonstrated that both gender and marital status are significantly associated with positive affect (Gender: $\beta = 0.318$, $p < 0.001$; Marital status: $\beta = 0.201$, $p < 0.05$) but not with negative affect. Results indicated that the indigenous males have 0.32 standard deviations increased positive affect as compared to the indigenous females and that married individuals have 0.20 standard deviations increased positive affect as compared to their unmarried counterparts. Along with previous studies the present study advances the understanding that gender and marital status inequalities in affect are not specific to a particular community; rather it is a generalized picture of all societies. In general, men possess more positive affect than females; married persons possess more positive affect than the unmarried persons.

Introduction

Psychologists have shown much interest to the study of human affect in recent decades. However, they have given little attention to the affect of indigenous community, a group having distinct cultural and social identity. This has given us incomplete understanding of the nature of human affect. Thus it is important to study the affect of indigenous people as is important to study the affect of the people of mainstream society. Affect refers to the experience of feeling or emotion as distinguished from cognition, thought, or action⁽¹⁾. It is a key part of the process of an organism's interaction with environment and stimuli.

Although there have been several models of affect, the present study uses the model put forward by Watson and Tellegen⁽²⁾. In their model, they proposed the two-dimensional structure of affect in which both positive and negative affects were defined and measured as bipolar opposites. They also interpreted the positive and negative dimensions in terms of valence - high versus low positive affect and high versus low negative affect (Fig. 1).

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Research on happiness and subjective well-being suggests a mixed picture of the relationship between positive affect and negative affect. Some studies have shown that positive affect and negative affect are inversely related⁽⁴⁾. Other studies have demonstrated that over time, positive affect and negative affect are independent across persons, thus denying the concept that positive affect and negative affect are two opposite poles of a single hedonic dimension. For example, Wessman and Ricks⁽⁵⁾ conducted a study to examine the fluctuations of daily affect in a small group of students. They found that persons differed in terms of their day-to-day affective states along two basic dimensions that were independent of each other. Bradburn⁽⁶⁾, who made another important contribution in this area, collected data in several national samples and reported that positive affect and negative affect, when measured separately, varied independently. Thus it can be concluded that positive affect and negative affect a person experiences are unrelated to each other⁽⁷⁾.

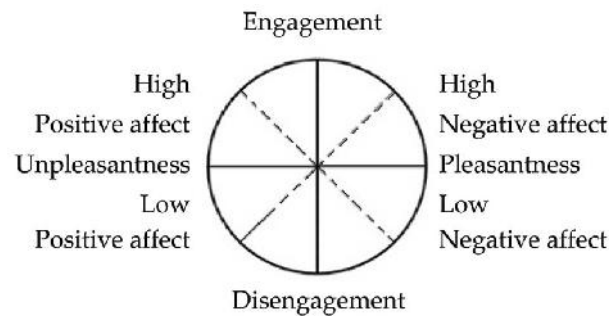


Fig. 1. Watson and Tellegen's model of the core affect (Source: Russell and Barrett⁽³⁾).

In addition, relative independence of the positive affect and negative affect scientists have shown that affect or emotion can be different from male to female and from married to unmarried persons. Specifically, self-perceptions of emotional behavior have indicated that the typical female shows emotions more extremely than the typical male⁽⁸⁾. Lutz⁽⁹⁾ attributed this fact partly to the differences in socialization and partly to the differences in biological processes (e.g., birth, menstruation, specific hormonal secretion) that produce emotion. Research on socialization describes that women are socialized to be more expressive of their feelings in both verbal and non-verbal (e.g., facial expression, gesture) communications⁽⁹⁻¹⁰⁾. For example, Lutz⁽⁹⁾ found that women talked about the control of emotion more than twice as often as did men. Brody and Hall⁽¹¹⁾ argued that gender differences in emotions are adaptive for the differing roles that males and females play. Enactment of caretaker roles by women is likely to involve sensitivity to the needs of others, and emotional expression, whereas men's roles are less likely to emphasize emotional responsiveness⁽¹²⁾. Scientists have also shown that marriage has a positive

relationship with increased positive well-being and attenuated negative outcomes for both men and women⁽¹³⁾. Married individuals report lower rates of psychological symptoms than do the unmarried, and they seek psychological services less frequently⁽¹⁴⁾. The effects in relation to marriage and positive well-being have been obtained with reported happiness, life satisfaction, and aggregate indices of the occurrence of positive and negative emotions^(6,15-17). Thus gender- and marital status-linked differences in human emotion or affect are well documented. Yet, the scenario is confined to the mainstream society only. Data on the affect of indigenous people with respect to their gender and marital status are almost non-existent. That is, we still do not know whether indigenous men and indigenous women differ in emotional expressivity or affective state, nor do we know whether married and unmarried people express their affect or emotion in a different way. The present study was, therefore, designed to understand the affective state of Bangladeshi ethnic community in relation to gender and marital status.

Objectives: The specific objectives of the study were to examine whether there is (i) any gender inequality in the positive affect and negative affect of ethnic community and (ii) any marital status inequality in the positive affect and negative affect of ethnic community.

Hypotheses: The following hypotheses were formulated in the light of the past findings stated above. (i) Males would show higher positive affect than their female counterparts. (ii) Males would show lower negative affect than their female counterparts. (iii) Married persons would show higher positive affect than unmarried persons and (iv) Married persons would show lower negative affect than unmarried persons.

Materials and Methods

Participants: A total of 103 indigenous people aged 18 to 54 were selected purposively from Chittagong Hill Tracts and Greater Mymensingh. This was done without considering the proportions of different communities in indigenous population. Thus participants were selected disproportionately from 8 indigenous communities including 62.1% Chakma, 19.4% Tripura, 8.7% Marma, 5.8% Garo and 4.0% others. 71.8% of the participants were males and 28.2% were females; 18.4% of them were married and 81.6% were unmarried.

Measure: An adapted Bangla version⁽¹⁸⁾ of the Positive Affect Negative Affect Scales (PANAS), originally developed by Watson *et al.*⁽¹⁹⁾, was used in the study. The PANAS comprises 20 mood expressing items to be rated on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (very slightly) to 5 (extremely). Ten of the items measure Positive Affect (PA) and the other ten items measure Negative Affect (NA). Watson *et al.*⁽¹⁹⁾ reported high internal consistencies (Cronbach's α) ranging from 0.86 - 0.90 for PA and 0.84 - 0.87 for NA. The test-retest reliabilities over a two-month-period were also satisfactory. The original scale has good convergent (correlations with factors range from 0.89 - 0.95) and discriminant

validity (correlations range from 0.02 to 0.18). Significant correlations with other measures of psychological distress (e.g., Beck Depression Inventory) support its external validity⁽²⁰⁾. Correlation between the Bangla and English versions of the full length PANAS was 0.58⁽¹⁸⁾. Correlations between the Bangla and English versions were 0.52 for PA and 0.77 for NA⁽²¹⁾. Cronbach's α coefficients for the Bangla version of PA and NA were 0.69 and 0.85, respectively⁽²¹⁾.

Procedures: Standard data collection procedures were followed in the study. Two indigenous field workers (graduate students) were recruited and trained to administer the surveys. They visited different indigenous communities located at the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Greater Mymensingh, and contacted the participants in person. At the beginning, they briefed about the general purpose of the study to the participants and established good rapport with them. They distributed the surveys to the participants individually, asking to read the instructions printed on the questionnaires, record the socio-demographic information (e.g., gender, marital status) and respond to the items during free time. After completion of their task, the questionnaires were collected and they were thanked for participation. Thus data collection was completed approximately in 8 weeks.

Data analysis: Each participant received two scores on the scale: a PA score and an NA score. As the present study was correlational in its design, data were analyzed in multiple regression using PA and NA as the criterion variables, and gender and marital status as the predictor variables. Major assumptions of the multiple regressions (linearity, normality, homoscedasticity and multi-collinearity) were met in the present data.

Results and Discussion

Adjusted R^2 in Table 1 indicates that the model was significant and explains 12.7% of the variance in participant's PA. However, a non-significant model emerged for NA (data not shown). Standardized β values in Table 1 show that both gender ($\beta = 0.318$, $p < 0.001$) and marital status ($\beta = 0.201$, $p < 0.05$) were significant predictors of PA. Part correlation coefficients (r_p) indicate that the unique contribution to the variance in PA was highest for gender (10.11%) followed by marital status (4.04%). Thus the study demonstrated that gender- and marital status contributes to the positive affect (PA) but not to the negative affect (NA). Specifically, results indicated that males have 0.32 standard deviations increased positive affect as compared to females, but no corresponding difference was observed in negative affect. The findings support the first hypothesis but not the second one. The results are fairly consistent with a number of past studies in the mainstream society showing that men and women differ in yielding certain positive and negative feelings. For example, men of the mainstream society report more positive feelings than women, which have been explained by the differences in social position, household income, and other gender inequalities in the family and workplace⁽²²⁾. Present authors

argue that like women of the mainstream society women of the ethnic community also experience discrimination or differential treatments in every sphere of their lives. For example, they experience less educational opportunities, less participation in decision making, family and social activities, higher financial disparity etc. All these together might lead to lower positive affect in the indigenous women. However, this should not be necessarily compensated by a higher negative affect as the negative affect and positive affect are independent of each other^(5-6,23). Thus, positive affect and negative affect are possibly two different constructs and a difference in one should not necessarily be accompanied by a difference in another.

Table 1. Regression of PA on gender- and marital status.

Predictor variables	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	p	r _p	r _p ² × 100
	B	SE	β				
(Constant)	30.932	1.173		26.36	0.000		
¹ Gender (M)	4.629	1.348	0.318	3.434	0.001	0.318	10.11
² Marital Status (Ma)	3.394	1.563	0.201	2.172	0.032	0.201	4.04

Adjusted R² = 0.127 (F_{2, 100} = 8.405, p < 0.001). ¹Gender (M) was used here as a dummy variable coded as '1' or '0'. '1' stands for a membership of the male category and '0' stands for a non-membership of the male category. If '1' changes to '0' the variable switches to Gender (F), i.e., female. ²Marital Status (Ma) was used as a dummy variable coded as '1' or '0'. '1' stands for a membership of the married category and '0' stands for a non-membership of the married category. If '1' changes to '0' the variable switches to Marital Status (Un), i.e., unmarried.

Like gender, marital status was strongly and positively associated with the participants' positive affect only ($\beta = 0.201$, $p < 0.05$). Results indicated that married indigenous people have 0.20 standard deviations increased positive affect as compared to their unmarried counterparts. However, it did not show any corresponding difference in negative affect. The findings support the third hypothesis but not the fourth one. The results echo the findings of the past studies. Researchers have documented a wide range of benefits from marriage which leads to better physical and psychological health e.g., less substance abuse and less depression⁽²⁴⁾. Studies have shown that marriage goes in line with higher happiness levels⁽²⁵⁻²⁶⁾. In general, married women are happier than unmarried women, and married men are happier than unmarried men. Stutzer and Frey⁽²⁴⁾ demonstrated that married persons have greater subjective well-being than persons who have never been married or had been divorced, separated or widowed. Married women and married men tended to possess similar levels of subjective well-being⁽²⁴⁾. Marriage provides additional sources of self-esteem by releasing from stress, and gives more life satisfaction. Married people have a chance to enjoy supportive intimate relationship, and suffer less from loneliness⁽²⁴⁾.

As stated earlier and above the past studies have shown gender and marital status inequalities in the affect of the people of mainstream society. The present study advances our understanding that gender and marital status inequalities in affect are not specific to a particular community; rather it is a generalized picture of all societies. That is, men possess more positive affect than females; married persons possess more positive affect than the unmarried persons.

Some inconsistency is noticeable in the present study. That is, gender or marital status has no contribution to the negative affect, a finding contrary to the finding for positive affect. This was unexpected and cannot be explained by the present data. The study has also some inherent limitations. For example, it cannot explain a large proportion of the variance in positive affect. To exclude such limitations, further studies can be carried out on a large scale sample comprising all types of tribes from different parts of Bangladesh. This study recruited participants from Chittagong Hill Tracts and Greater Mymensingh. Yet, the findings are important because a big proportion of the society is female even in ethnic community. So, psychologists, counselors, and other mental health professionals should give special attention to maintain positive affect among indigenous women, as they do with women of the mainstream society. The present findings also bring for the unmarried indigenous adults an important message that marriage can help foster positive affect and therefore be beneficial for mental health.

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