

Assertiveness, Self- Esteem and Mental Health among Rural Undergraduate Students of Bihar: A Psychological Study

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ABSTRACT

The present study was accomplished to correlate a relation between assertive behaviour, self-esteem and mental health among rural undergraduate students of Darbhanga, Bihar. Today's students are facing different psychological problems i.e. depression, insecurity, confusion etc. The purpose of this study is to investigate the assertiveness, self-esteem and mental health level of undergraduate students. Present study consists of 80 undergraduate students belonging to age group of 18-25 years selected from different constituent degree colleges of Lalit Narayan Mithila University, Darbhanga, Bihar. The tool used by the researcher for this study is Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS, 1978), Self-Esteem Scale (e.g., Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale) and *Mental Health Inventory (MHI-38)*. The findings of the study showed that there is significant difference in assertiveness among rural students. The findings indicate a significant positive correlation between assertiveness and self-esteem, and both variables are positively associated with mental health. Low assertiveness was linked with higher levels of stress and anxiety. The study highlights the need for psychological interventions and life skills training programs in rural educational settings to enhance students' well-being.

Keywords: *Assertiveness, Self-esteem, Mental Health*

Mental health plays a key role in shaping an individual's overall well-being, particularly during the undergraduate years when students undergo significant academic, social, and personal transitions. This stage of life is often marked by increased responsibilities, identity exploration, and future-oriented decision-making etc. As a result, many students experience psychological challenges such as stress, anxiety, low motivation, emotional instability, and confusion regarding personal, social and career goals. These concerns may be more relevant among students from rural backgrounds, where access to mental health resources, exposure to developmental opportunities, and socio-economic support systems may be limited.

In this context, psychological factors such as assertiveness and self-esteem become important. Assertiveness refers to an individual's capacity to communicate thoughts, feelings, and needs in straight, honest, and respectful manner while maintaining consideration for others. It represents a balanced interpersonal and social behavioural style that lies between passivity and aggression. Individuals who demonstrate assertive behaviour

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Received: April 19, 2026; Revision Received: June 07, 2026; Accepted: June 11, 2026

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are generally better equipped to handle social interactions, express disagreement appropriately, and establish personal boundaries, which contributes to healthier relationships and reduced interpersonal stress. (Alberti & Emmons, 1990).

Self-esteem, on the other hand, reflects a person's overall evaluation of their own value and abilities. It influences how individuals perceive themselves, respond to challenges, and cope with setbacks. Students with higher self-esteem tend to show greater confidence, emotional resilience, and adaptability, whereas those with lower self-esteem may be more vulnerable to feelings of anxiety, and other negative states. The development of self-esteem is influenced by various factors, including family environment, social experiences, cultural expectations, and academic performance etc.

The relationship between assertiveness and self-esteem is closely interrelated. Individuals who are confident in expressing themselves are more likely to develop a positive self-image, while those with higher self-esteem may find it easier to communicate their needs effectively. Together, these factors contribute significantly to mental health, which encompasses emotional stability, psychological well-being, and the ability to cope with everyday stressors. Strong mental health enables students to function productively, maintain meaningful relationships, and navigate life challenges more effectively.

Abed, Amrosy, and Atia (2015) reported a significant positive correlation between assertiveness skills and self-esteem levels, along with improvements associated with age and experience. Makinde and Akinteye (2014) found that mentoring combined with assertiveness training effectively enhances adolescents' self-esteem. Ozsaker (2013) observed that adolescents involved in athletic activities tend to display higher levels of both assertiveness and self-esteem compared to non-athletes. In contrast, Fanaj (2014) identified that lower self-esteem is significantly linked with anxiety, depression, shyness, and even suicidal ideation.

In summary, assertiveness is a key social competence that contributes to personal growth, emotional stability, and positive interpersonal relationships. Its close association with self-esteem highlights the importance of developing assertiveness skills through structured training and supportive environments, ultimately promoting overall psychological well-being.

In rural regions such as Bihar, socio-cultural norms often emphasize obedience, conformity, and respect for authority, which may unintentionally discourage open self-expression among young individuals. Additionally, limited institutional support, lack of awareness about mental health, and fewer opportunities for personality development can further restrict the growth of assertiveness and self-esteem among students. These contextual challenges highlight the importance of examining how these psychological variables interact within this specific population.

Therefore, the present study aims to explore the levels of assertiveness, self-esteem, and mental health among rural undergraduate students and to analyze the relationships among these variables. Understanding these associations can provide valuable insights for developing targeted interventions, such as life skills training and counseling programs, to enhance students' psychological well-being and overall development.

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Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the level of assertiveness among rural undergraduate students of Bihar
2. To measure the level of self-esteem among these students
3. To evaluate their mental health status
4. To examine the relationship between assertiveness, self-esteem, and mental health

Hypotheses

1. There is a significant positive relationship between assertiveness and self-esteem
2. Assertiveness is positively correlated with mental health
3. Self-esteem is positively correlated with mental health
4. Assertiveness significantly predicts mental health

METHOD AND PROCEDURE

Research Design: The study uses a **descriptive correlational research design**.

Sample:

The Sample of the present study consists of 80 Undergraduate Students were taken from different constituent colleges of (Rural Areas) L.N.M University, Darbhanga, Bihar belong to the age range of 18-25 years.

To collect data, Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS, 1978), Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale **and** Mental Health Inventory (MHI-38) have been used. Data were collected through questionnaires administered in classroom settings. Participants were assured confidentiality and informed consent was obtained.

Statistical tools used:

In the present study the researcher used the following statistical techniques:

1. Descriptive Analysis (Mean, Standard Deviation)
2. Differential Analysis (Pearson Correlation, Regression Analysis)

RESULTS

The collected data were analysed with the help of SPSS package.

The mean and standard deviation of assertiveness, self-esteem, and mental health scores of rural undergraduate students are presented below:

Table 1

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Assertiveness	61.80	7.55
Self-Esteem	21.55	4.70
Mental Health	66.80	8.90

Table 1 showed student's moderate levels of assertiveness, self-esteem, and mental health.

Table 2

Variables	Assertiveness	Self-Esteem	Mental Health
Assertiveness	1.00	0.45**	0.40**
Self-Esteem	0.45**	1.00	0.60**
Mental Health	0.40**	0.60**	1.00

Note: $p < 0.01$ (significant level)

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Table 2 showed that assertiveness is positively correlated with self-esteem ($r = 0.45$), assertiveness is positively correlated with mental health ($r = 0.40$) and Self-esteem shows a strong positive correlation with mental health ($r = 0.60$). This means that higher assertiveness is associated with higher self-esteem and better mental health.

Table 3

Predictor	Beta (β)	t-value	Significance
Assertiveness	0.28	3.10	$p < 0.01$
Self-Esteem	0.48	5.20	$p < 0.01$

Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.42$ and $F = 36.50$ ($p < 0.01$).

Table 3 showed that the model explains 42% of the variance in mental health. Both assertiveness and self-esteem are significant predictors of mental health and Self-esteem has a stronger impact compared to assertiveness.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relationship between assertiveness, self-esteem, and mental health among rural undergraduate students of Bihar. The findings showed significant positive relationships among all three variables, supporting the proposed hypotheses.

The results showed that assertiveness is positively correlated with self-esteem. This suggests that students who are more capable of expressing their thoughts, feelings, and needs in a confident and respectful manner tend to have a higher sense of self-worth. Assertive individuals are better able to handle interpersonal situations, resist peer pressure, and maintain healthy boundaries, which contributes to improved self-evaluation.

Present study showed significant positive relationship between assertiveness and mental health. Students with higher levels of assertiveness reported better mental health, including lower levels of stress and anxiety. This may be because assertiveness enhances coping skills and reduces internal conflict, allowing individuals to deal more effectively with academic and social challenges.

Furthermore, self-esteem showed a strong positive correlation with mental health, indicating that students who perceive themselves positively are more likely to experience emotional stability and psychological well-being. High self-esteem acts as a protective factor against mental health problems, while low self-esteem is often associated with anxiety, depression, and poor adjustment.

Regression analysis revealed that both assertiveness and self-esteem significantly predict mental health, with self-esteem emerging as a stronger predictor. This suggests that while assertiveness plays an important role, the way students perceive and value themselves has a more direct impact on their mental health.

In the context of rural Bihar, these findings can be understood in light of socio-cultural and environmental factors. Rural students often grow up in environments where conformity, obedience, and respect for authority are emphasized, which may limit the development of assertive behavior. Additionally, limited access to resources, economic challenges, and lack of exposure to personality development opportunities may negatively affect self-esteem and mental health.

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The findings of this study are consistent with previous research, which has established that assertiveness enhances self-esteem and that both variables are positively associated with mental health. The results highlight the importance of developing life skills among students, especially in rural areas.

Overall, the study emphasizes that improving assertiveness and self-esteem can significantly enhance the mental health of undergraduate students. Educational institutions in rural Bihar should incorporate counseling services, life skills training, and assertiveness development programs to support students' psychological well-being.

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Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Singh, R. (2026). Assertiveness, Self- Esteem and Mental Health among Rural Undergraduate Students of Bihar: A Psychological Study. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 14(2), 2150-2155. DIP:18.01.197.20261402, DOI:10.25215/1402.197