

Assessment Of Character Strengths Among College Students Of Jammu.**Abstract*****Romesh Kumar,**Arti Bakhshi**

Positive psychology has refocused on character and virtue as relevant topics of study for social science (McCullough & Snyder, 2000). Present study assessed character strengths using Values in action (VIA-IS) among college students of District Jammu. Sample consisted of 809 students (male= 349, female= 460) studying in government degree colleges, who were randomly selected to fill 120 item paper pencil version of (VIA-IS). Results indicated that college students endorsed the presence of character strengths in them. Means and standard deviations for each of the 24 VIA character strengths were calculated to determine the most and least endorsed character strengths. Results showed that College students when examined together showed a mean endorsement of 3.83 on the 24 character strengths and their top strengths were Integrity, Kindness, Spirituality, Fairness and citizenship. Males had mean endorsement of 3.86 on the 24 Character strengths and their top five strengths were Integrity, Kindness, Spirituality, Fairness, Hope, whereas female have mean endorsement 3.82 and their top five strengths were Integrity, Kindness, Spirituality, Fairness and Leadership. Results of t test analysis showed significant gender differences in 8 out of 24 character strengths namely creativity, perspective, bravery, persistence, vitality, kindness, prudence, and self-regulation.

Key Words: *Character strengths, Virtues, Gender differences, VIA-IS, College students.*

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Introduction

One of the most significant contributions of positive psychology for empirically studying character is classification of strengths of character and virtues.(Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This classification of human strengths and virtues is placed at three conceptual levels starting with *virtues*, the core characteristics recognized by theologians and moral philosophers at level one, *character strengths* which are the psychological elements making up the virtues at level two and *situational themes* which are the specific habits that direct an individual to exhibit particular character strengths in particular situations at the last level (Peterson & Seligman 2004). According to Peterson and Seligman (2004) people possess five ‘signature’ or ‘top five’ strengths out of 24. These signature strengths are personal traits or characteristics that a person feels they own, celebrate, and frequently exercise. Identification and development of the character strengths is the prime focus of the emerging field of positive psychology in pursuit for good life (Seligman, 2000).

Research studies prove that practice of signature strengths is linked with a positive outcomes like positive emotions, positive engagement and well-being school success, academic achievement, decreased psychopathology etc. There is dearth of research studies on signature strengths in South Asian countries, though there are a lot of research studies on character strength profiling of students from different countries since their introduction in 2004. According to Peterson and Seligman (2004) character strengths are affected by different variables including gender. Gender differences in character strengths are less explored in Indian context. Present study tries to fill this gap by providing an input about the character strength profiling of college students from Indian context.

In a web based study investigating the relative prevalence of 24 character strengths, Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2006) concluded that character strengths are universal.

Kindness, fairness, honesty, gratitude and judgement were found to be the most prevalent character strengths in human beings in descending order and prudence, modesty, and self-regulation turned out to be least prevalent character strengths.

In an online study by Robert McGrath (2014), Honesty, Fairness, Kindness, Judgment, and curiosity were reported to be most highly endorsed character strengths while the least endorsed were self-regulation, modesty, prudence, and spirituality.

Study by Karris and Craighead (2012) reported that college students do have the 24 character strengths, but students mostly endorsed character strengths of Humor, Love, Kindness, Integrity, and Social intelligence. Karris and Craighead (2012) while exploring character strengths among college students reported that humor, love, kindness, honesty, and social intelligence were most endorsed character strengths among college students. Humility, self-regulation, spirituality, love of learning, and prudence were least endorsed.

Males significantly differed from females on 11 out of the 24 Character strengths as males scored significantly higher than females on creativity, bravery, and self-regulation whereas females scored higher than males on kindness, love, gratitude, forgiveness, appreciation of beauty and excellence, prudence, fairness, and leadership.

In a study examining the relationships between character strengths and psychological well-being, Gustems and Calderon (2014) found that kindness, fairness, citizenship, love, and Integrity were the five top character strengths.

Brdar, Anic and Rijavec (2011) in a study of gender differences and character strengths, carried on Croatian students found that women highly endorsed the strengths of love, gratitude, kindness, and fairness, whereas male highly endorsed the strengths of honesty, hope, humour, gratitude, and curiosity.

Ovejero and Cardenal (2011) in a study carried on Spanish sample found that males scored significantly lower than females in Kindness, Creativity, love of learning, Social intelligence, Fairness, Leadership, and Forgiveness, Appreciation of beauty, Gratitude, and Spirituality.

In Israel, Ovadia and Lavy (2012) found that women highly endorsed the strengths of love, appreciation of beauty and gratitude while men highly endorsed creativity. Present study provides an input regarding Character strengths of college students from north India i.e Jammu, Jammu and Kashmir.

Hypothesis

1. College students will endorse 24 VIA character strengths.
2. Signature strengths of male and female college students will be similar.
3. There will be significant gender differences in character strength endorsement.

Methodology

Sample

Sample comprised of 809 (male = 349 and female = 460) college students representing all the semesters/years, from all the streams (humanities, sciences, commerce) pursuing academic and professional courses at government degree colleges of District Jammu having age range of 17 to 24 years. Random sampling technique was used to select the sample.

Tool

Character strengths were assessed using the 120 items version of Values in action Inventory of strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) by Littman-Ovadia and Lavy (2015).

It consists of a 5-point Likert scale to indicate whether the item is “very much like me” (5) or “not like me at all” (1). It contains 05 items on each of the 24 Strengths measuring all the constructs in equivalent manner. Scores on each character strength range from 5 to 25. Higher scores indicate greater endorsement of the strength.

Procedure

The VIA-IS inventory was distributed to the participants in the classroom during class-hours with the presentation of standardized instructions. Items were read aloud to maintain a steady pace of responses. The time taken for completion was between 30-40 minutes. Every query of the participants was satisfactorily answered by researcher.

Results and Discussion.

The main aim of the present study was to assess and describe VIA character strengths within college students of district Jammu.

The means and standard deviations for each of the 24 character strengths were calculated to examine the most and least endorsed character strengths. Table 1 shows self described character strengths rank ordered from most endorsed to least endorsed as per the mean scores. Males endorsed the character strengths as “like me” and they had mean endorsement of 3.86 on the 24 Character. Their top five character strengths were Integrity ($M=4.27, s.d=2.67$), Kindness ($M=4.11, s.d=2.62$), Spirituality ($M=4.04, s.d=2.98$), Fairness ($M=4.01, s.d=2.88$) and Hope ($M=3.98, s.d=2.84$). Female also endorsed the character strengths as “Like me” and they had mean endorsement of 3.82 on the 24 character strengths. Their top strengths were Integrity ($M=4.33, s.d=2.47$), Kindness ($M=4.19, s.d=2.48$), Spirituality ($M=4.03, s.d=2.67$), Fairness ($M=4.00, s.d=2.89$), and Leadership ($M=3.97, s.d=2.80$).

Male and female college students when examined together showed a mean endorsement of 3.83 and the most endorsed strengths were Integrity ($M=4.30, s.d=2.56$), Kindness ($M=4.16, s.d=2.55$), Spirituality ($M=4.04, s.d=2.81$), Fairness ($M=4.00, s.d=2.88$) citizenship ($M=3.94, s.d=3.05$).

Table 2 shows most commonly self described character strengths rank ordered by gender as per the mean scores and Table-3 shows least endorsed character strengths in ascending order of their means.

Five least endorsed character strengths among males were Love of learning ($M=3.41, s.d=3.22$), Forgiveness ($M=3.57, s.d=2.76$), Self regulation ($M=3.59, s.d=2.92$), Humility ($M=3.61, s.d=2.87$) and Perspective ($M=3.67, s.d=3.03$). Least endorsed character strengths among females were self regulation ($M=3.42, s.d=2.80$), love of learning ($M=3.42, s.d=3.12$), Perspective ($M=3.55, s.d=3.01$), Forgiveness ($M=3.56, s.d=2.96$) and Humility ($M=3.58, s.d=2.84$).

In the overall sample least endorsed character strengths were Love of learning ($M=3.41, s.d=3.17$), Self regulation ($M=3.49, s.d=2.88$), Forgiveness ($M=3.57, s.d=2.87$), Humility ($M=3.59, s.d=2.85$), Perspective ($M=3.60, s.d=3.03$).

Independent sample t-test was performed to see gender differences in character strengths. As shown in Table-4 significant gender differences were reported in 8 out of 24 character strengths namely Creativity ($t=2.66, p=.008$), Perspective ($t=2.80, p=.005$), Bravery ($t=2.93, p=.004$), Persistence ($t=3.74, p=0.00$), Vitality ($t=2.44, p=.015$), Kindness ($t=2.25, p=.024$), Prudence ($t=2.36, p=.018$) and Self-regulation ($t=4.11, p=0.00$).

College male and females did not significantly differ even on single character strength under virtue of Justice and Transcendence.

The main aim of the present study was to assess and describe VIA character strengths within college students of District Jammu. Based upon literature review, it was hypothesized that college students will favourably endorse 24 character strengths and there will be similarity in signature strengths of both males and females. It was also hypothesized that there will be significant gender differences in character strengths. Overall results indicated that college

students from district Jammu possessed character strengths. Both males and females endorsed the character strengths as “Like me”. The tendency to self-describe themselves as honest, kind, spiritual and fair was widespread in overall sample. Love of learning, self regulation, humility, forgiveness, and perspective were among the bottom five strengths in both males and females.

Mean endorsement score of males were slightly greater than those of females indicating that college male students of district Jammu possessed higher strengths of character than females. There was considerable similarity between the signature strengths of males and females. There were significant gender differences in 8 out of 24 character strengths. Integrity, Kindness, Spirituality and Fairness were top four signature strengths among both males and females. Integrity that is synonymous with honesty, authenticity, genuineness, sincerity came out to be the top rated character strength of Jammu youth. Jammu college students irrespective of gender came out to be honest, without pretense and those who take responsibility for one's feelings and actions.

On the whole college students from District Jammu endorsed the 24 character strengths.

These results are partially consistent with previous research studies that college students endorsed strengths of character. (Karris, 2004; Karris & Craighead 2012; Kamboj & Kakkar 2012; Shimai, et al. 2006).

Karris and Craighead (2012) also reported that Kindness, Honesty were two of the most endorsed character strengths among college students. Brdar, Anic and Rijavec (2011) in a study of character strengths, carried on Croatian students reported that men scored high on integrity, hope, humour, gratitude, and curiosity whereas females highly endorsed the strengths of love, gratitude, kindness, and fairness, whereas. Results of the present study are partially consistent for the strengths of kindness and fairness for females and Integrity and Hope for males.

Many previous studies(Karris,2004; Karris & Craighead 2012; Gustems & Calderon,2014, Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006) have found that integrity, kindness and fairness are among the most endorsed Strengths in college students. Difference in character strength endorsement in present study by college students may be attributed to age and sociocultural factors. A longitudinal study is needed to ascertain the impact of age or other sociocultural variables on the development of character strengths.

College students from district Jammu scored higher on the virtues of Courage(Integrity), Humanity(Kindness), Transcendence(Hope), Justice(Fairness, Leadership, Citizenship), out of six virtues. Self-regulation, love of learning, Perspective, Forgiveness came out to be least endorsed character strengths among college students of Jammu. They scored low on character strengths of virtue Temperance and Wisdom. Virtue of Temperance has forgiveness, humility, prudence, and self-regulation as its character strengths. Temperance covers Strengths that protect against lack of moderation. According to Peterson and Seligman (2004) Self-control is a vital psychological strength that is important for well-being and, therefore should be developed. Jammu youth not endorsing the Character strengths under virtue Temperance is not a healthy trend. Strategies can be developed by colleges to develop self control/self regulation in students as it is linked with multiple positive outcomes.

First four character strength with highest score namely Integrity, Kindness, Spirituality, Fairness were similar among males, females and overall sample indicating a trend towards similarity of males and female than difference. Fifth most endorsed strength among male and females were hope and leadership respectively indicating a difference in possession of character strengths by males and females. Unlike most endorsed Strengths, least endorsed character strengths differed among male, female and overall sample. This might be attributed to changing sex roles in modern times.

Leadership came out to be one of the most endorsed character strength among females. Character strength of leadership as per VIA classification (Peterson & Seligman 2004) is encouraging an ingroup to get things accomplished and at the same time maintain good relations within the group; organizing group activities and monitoring that the activities happen. Females are universally known to be good at maintaining relations. Hope came out to be fifth top self-described strength in males. In a way we can say that Jammu males were found to be hopeful and future minded despite so many obstacles since many years. In an online survey Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2006) found self-regulation as least endorsed character strength among their sample. In the present study self-regulation came out to be one of the least self-described character strength among college students. This can be attributed to the carefree nature of late adolescents and young adults. College life is the time for sensation seeking and exploring different possibilities. Unless this energy is channelized properly, college students can go astray.

The depiction of a nurturing, kind, loving, appreciative, excusing, and reasonable individual intently takes after the conventional sex generalization credited to ladies. Similarly the depiction of somebody bold, innovative, and self-controlled looks like the conventional sexual orientation generalization credited to men. (Golombok & Fivush, 1994). Eagly and Wood (1999) were of the view point that the origin of behavioral differences between male and female is due to either their evolved dispositions or differences in the placement of female and in the social structure.

The findings are that fairness, honesty, kindness, spirituality and teamwork came out to be hallmark of Jammu youth and they seem to lack self-control, seem to lack passion for learning and also lack humility. These findings are consistent with many previous research studies cited in previous discussions. Strength-based interventions are needed for developing strengths of Wisdom and Temperance.

The generalizability of the findings is limited because the sample consisted of college students from government degree colleges of Jammu district only. Use of self report measure like VIA-IS has its own disadvantages like social desirability, memory bias, shallow information and dependency on the mood of the participant etc. Despite these shortcomings, the present study provides insight regarding the strength profiling of college youth of Jammu. Future research should take a representative sample consisting of diverse population and age groups including participants from professional colleges. Future research must also apply multimethod approach for character strength assessment.

Implications

Findings of the present study have several implications. Identification and nurturing strengths must be the focus of current education system. This may contribute to a variety of positive outcomes as well as work as a buffer against a variety of negative outcomes, including psychological disorders. Assessment is the first step towards undertaking any strength based intervention. Strength based programmes targeting those Strengths on which students scored low (Strengths of Temperance in present case) can be developed to make them more prevalent for positive life outcomes. Signature strength profiling of an individual can give an individual an insight about practicing it more for better life outcomes. Present study does strength profiling of a large college sample. Findings of the study also add up to the global basic research literature on character strengths. Discovering gender differences in character strengths is to discover the causes, development, changes, and consequences of the noteworthy gender differences existing in character strengths. In case of significant gender differences, causes and conditions responsible for these differences can be further investigated. Strength based positive interventions can be designed as per the needs of the gender as their effectiveness may vary with gender. It will also give a knowledge about the need for control of gender in statistical analysis to avoid biases.

Conclusion: College students from district Jammu favourably endorsed the prevalence of character strengths in them. Male and female have more commonalities (Integrity, Kindness, Spirituality, Fairness.) in their signature strengths than differences (Hope, Leadership). It can be concluded that College students scored higher on the virtues of Courage, Humanity, Transcendence and Justice out of six virtues irrespective of gender and scored lower on the virtues of Temperance and Wisdom. Though there are significant gender differences in few of the character strengths yet present research study supports the gender similarity hypothesis.

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Table-1

Mean, SD, of overall sample,male& female and on 24 character strengths, N=809								
Character strengths.	Total sample N=809		Character strengths.	MALE=349		Character strengths.	FEMALE=460	
	Mean	(S.D)		Mean	S.D		Mean	S.D
Integrity	4.3	2.56	Integrity	4.27	2.67	Integrity	4.33	2.47
Kindness	4.16	2.55	Kindness	4.11	2.62	Kindness	4.19	2.48
Spirituality	4.04	2.81	Spirituality	4.04	2.98	Spirituality	4.03	2.67
Fairness	4	2.88	Fairness	4.01	2.88	Fairness	4	2.89
Citizenship	3.94	3.05	Hope	3.98	2.84	Leadership	3.97	2.8
Leadership	3.94	2.96	Curiosity	3.96	3.02	Love	3.95	3.19
Love	3.93	3.38	Persistence	3.96	3.04	Citizenship	3.94	2.99
Hope	3.93	2.9	Citizenship	3.95	3.13	Hope	3.9	2.95
Curiosity	3.92	2.82	Prudence	3.92	2.98	Curiosity	3.89	2.65
Social Intelligence	3.89	2.82	Love	3.9	3.62	Social Intelligence	3.88	2.78
Persistence	3.87	3.18	Social Intelligence	3.9	2.88	Appreciation of beauty	3.87	2.57
Appreciation of beauty	3.87	2.63	Leadership	3.9	3.16	Prudence	3.82	3.13
Prudence	3.86	3.07	Creativity	3.88	2.93	Persistence	3.8	3.25
Vitality	3.83	2.87	Vitality	3.87	2.93	Humor	3.8	3.05
Humor	3.83	3.06	Humor	3.87	3.06	Vitality	3.79	2.81
Creativity	3.82	2.95	Appreciation of beauty	3.86	2.7	Creativity	3.77	2.95
Open mindedness	3.76	2.69	Open mindedness	3.8	2.68	Gratitude	3.74	2.84
Gratitude	3.75	2.94	Bravery	3.8	2.98	Open mindedness	3.73	2.69
Bravery	3.72	2.92	Gratitude	3.76	3.07	Bravery	3.68	2.85
Perspective	3.6	3.03	Perspective	3.67	3.03	Humility	3.58	2.84
Humility	3.59	2.85	Humility	3.61	2.87	Forgiveness	3.56	2.96
Forgiveness	3.57	2.87	Self regulation	3.59	2.92	Perspective	3.55	3.01
Self regulation	3.49	2.88	Forgiveness	3.57	2.76	Love of Learning	3.42	3.12
Love of Learning	3.41	3.17	Love of Learning	3.41	3.22	Self regulation	3.42	2.8
	M=3.83			M=3.86			M=3.82	

Mean endorsement on 24 character strengths for overall sample,male& female is 3.83,3.86 and 3.82 respectively.

Table- 2
Most endorsed character strengths and corresponding virtues

S.No	Male N=349		Females N=460		Overall Sample N=809	
	Virtue	Character strengths	Virtue	Character strengths	Virtue	Character strengths
1	COURAGE	Integrity	COURAGE	Integrity	COURAGE	Integrity
2	HUMANITY	Kindness	HUMANITY	Kindness	HUMANITY	Kindness
3	TRANSCENDENCE	Spirituality	TRANSCENDENCE	Spirituality	TRANSCENDENCE	Spirituality
4	JUSTICE	Fairness	JUSTICE	Fairness	JUSTICE	Fairness
5	TRANSCENDENCE	Hope	JUSTICE	Leadership	JUSTICE	citizenship

Table 3
Least endorsed character strengths and corresponding virtues.

S.No	Male N=349		Females N=460		Overall Sample N=809	
	Virtue	Character strengths	Virtue	Character strengths	Virtue	Character strengths
1	WISDOM	Love of learning	TEMPERANCE	Self regulation	WISDOM	Love of learning
2	TEMPERANCE	Forgiveness	WISDOM	Love of learning	TEMPERANCE	Self regulation
3	TEMPERANCE	Self Regulation	WISDOM	Perspective	TEMPERANCE	Forgiveness
4	TEMPERANCE	Humility	TEMPERANCE	Forgiveness	TEMPERANCE	Humility
5	WISDOM	Perspective	TEMPERANCE	Humility	WISDOM	Perspective

Table 4**Independent sample t test.(N=809)**

Virtues and VIA-Character strengths	t value	p value
WISDOM		
Creativity	2.66	.008 **
Perspective	2.80	.005 **
COURAGE		
Bravery	2.93	.004**
Persistence	3.74	.000**
Vitality	2.44	.015 *
HUMANITY		
Kindness	2.25	.024*
TEMPERANCE		
Prudence	2.36	.018*
Selfregulation	4.11	.000**

*p<0.05; **P<0.01