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**ETHNIC IDENTITIES AND PSYCHO-SOCIAL
CORRELATES AMONG RAI COMMUNITY: A STUDY
FROM SIKKIM**

Abstract

Sikkim, a Himalayan state situated in the Northeastern part of India has a unique blend of ethnicity and different ancestral origins that have shaped a quintessential Sikkimese culture that circumscribes all the realms of life. This study examines the association between ethnic identity and well-being among the Rai community with different ancestral origins (Indian, Bhutan, and Nepal) residing in Sikkim which is one of the most ancient Indigenous ethnolinguistic groups and the same has been compared in terms of different socio-demographic variables including age and monthly income. The study consists of 120 participants from the Rai community exclusively residing in Sikkim following the purposive sampling method. The study followed a correlational and comparative research design and used the Ethnic Identity Scale, and PERMA for measuring well-being. Results revealed no correlation between ethnic identity and well-being. However, ancestral origin significantly impacted well-being, with those from Bhutan exhibiting higher well-being than those from India or Nepal. Other socio-demographic factors showed no significant influence. The study can uplift minority groups' socio-political status and preserve their culture and knowledge through government policies.

Keywords: *Rai community, ethnic identity, subjective well-being, Sikkim*

Situated between Nepal and Bhutan, Sikkim is a small and beautiful state of India, which is renowned for its breathtaking scenery, abundant biological diversity demonstrated by a variety of eco-climatic conditions, and a broad range of elevations (Rawat & Tambe 2011: 1-12). Sikkim, a state in the Himalayas, is renowned for its multiethnic and multicultural character. The cultural complex of the Sikkim Himalayan region is a composite of several cultural cosmos rolled into one (Bhasin 2011: 1-20). This little state's unique cultural variability has been shaped by its remote location and mountainous terrain (Chakraborty & Chakma 2016: 61-79).

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Rai Community

The Khambu Rais or Rais (meaning King) are one of the most ancient indigenous ethnolinguistic groups of Nepal, the Indian State of Sikkim and Darjeeling Hills. They refer to themselves as Khambu or Khambas traces their migration from Tibet in some remote past. They identify themselves with the Kirati group or the Kirat confederation which includes the communities Limbu, Sunuwar, Yakkha Dhimal, Koche, Meche, and Hayu (Rai 2020). According to one version Kirats migrated from east via north Burma and Assam along the mid hills (lower mountains) with their pigs in ancient times (Chatterjee 1951). The percentage of Khambu Rai in Darjeeling district based on the 2001 census is 11.5, that is 1,92,672 which is the highest among all ethnic groups of the district and according to the 2011 census, the population of Rai community is 2,50000 in Darjeeling District.

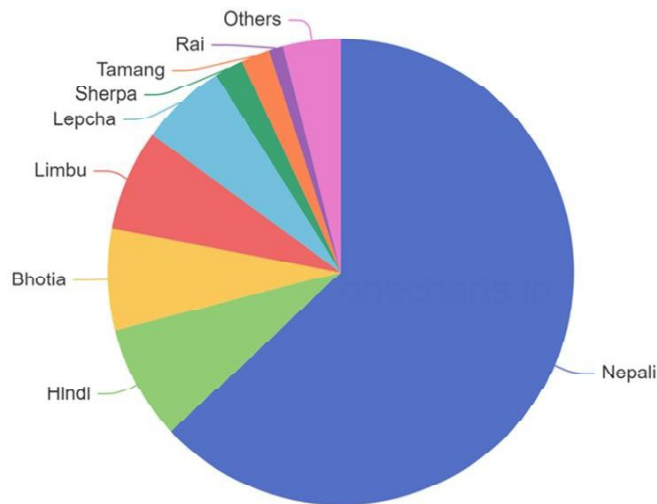


Figure 1: Sikkim State Language Census of 20

A Social Identity Theory Framework

With its rich cultural legacy and customs, the Rai community in Sikkim offers a unique context for investigating the connection between ancestry and psychological well-being. To fully grasp the depth of complexity that social cohesiveness and individual welfare have within this social context, one must attempt to unravel how cultural and ethnic linkages of the people define both individual and collective selves. It is also crucial, at this point, to explain the nature of these interactions using Henri Tajfel and John Turner's Social Identity Theory (SIT). According to SIT, a person's identity and self-concept are mostly derived from their affiliation with social groupings, such as their ethnic or cultural communities. Ancestral roots and cultural customs, such as reverencing the natural world and ancestors, are crucial in determining group

identity within the Rai community. In addition to fostering a sense of continuity and belonging, these customs offer a foundation for interpersonal relationships and group cohesion. Collaborative cultures place considerable value on group membership and interdependence, which emphasizes the role social identity plays in determining overall well-being. Through the application of Social Identity Theory, the study aims to investigate if ethnic identity and well-being is related among the Rai community, offering significant perspectives on the function of cultural heritage and social identity in promoting social cohesiveness and resilience in this distinct community.

Ancestral Origin

Ancestral origin holds a profound significance in shaping an individual's ethnic identity and overall well-being. It serves as a vital link to one's cultural heritage, traditions, and values, influencing various aspects of life, from social interactions to psychological well-being. Ancestral origin is very important in the formation of cultural identity, sense of belonging, cultural heritage preservation, and psychological well-being (Liebkind 2006: 78-96). A person's sense of pride and cultural identity are strengthened when they embrace their origins. Additionally, origins act as a storehouse for cultural legacy, conserving customs, rites, and practices that have been handed down through the ages. Accepting and honouring ancestor practices contributes to the preservation of cultural variety and enhances the human experience as a whole. Studies reveal a robust association between psychological well-being and a strong ethnic identity derived from ancestral origin. Significant effects of ancestral origin have been seen regarding self-identification, cultural adaptability, and interpersonal relationships. Similar cultural upbringings promote empathy and understanding, which strengthens links between neighbours (Morning & Saperstein 2018: 57-68, Peng et al. 2023: 208).

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a term which is socially defined as a group or category of individuals who identify with one another based on shared ancestors, cultural experiences, and social experiences. These ethnic groupings are identified by a shared cultural history, origin myth, ancestry, language, clothing style, physical appearance, and so on. Cultural origins and ethnicity provide such groups with a feeling of distinctness and divergence from other cultures in the same city or nation. Ethnicity is also described as a set of cultural features used to identify and classify people who are perceived to be considerably different from others in the same social environment (Dindyal & Dindyal 2004: 27-33).

The psychological significance of ethnic identity among ethnic minority groups might be traced to the marginalization and inequality that these communities have faced (Okolie & Manyeruke 2024; Santos et. 2024: 1-25). In the face of rejection and marginalization, a strong ethnic identification assists

individuals in recognizing positive qualities about their ethnic group, so mitigating the effects of derogatory attitudes that are propagated in societal structure (Outten et al. 2009: 146-170).

Studies available on ethnic identity indicate that exploring and committing to one's ethnic identity is connected with improved psychological well-being, self-esteem, and life satisfaction, particularly among people under the age of 40 (Chae & Foley 2010: 466–476, Smith & Silva 2011: 42). But identity of migrated individuals may encounter stressors of diminished social support networks, loss of status, and a general sense of threat to their ethnic identity (Lay & Nguyen 1998: 172-181, Dornisch et al. 2024).

Well-Being

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), psychological well-being is more than just the absence of mental illness; it is also a state in which individuals recognize their capacities, can cope with ordinary challenges, and can contribute to their community.

Well-being according to the PERMA model by Martin Seligman (2011) is predicted by five elements: (a) Positive Emotion, (b) Engagement, (c) Relationships, (d) Meaning, and (e) Accomplishment. Each element contributes to well-being, can be pursued for its own sake, and is independently defined and measured. The combination of PERMA elements promotes flourishing, which is the optimal functioning of individuals, groups, communities, nations, and society at large (Seligman 2011).

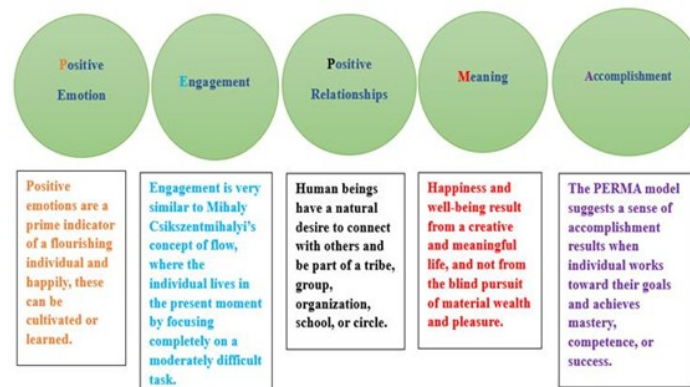


Figure 2: The five elements of PERMA model of Well-being

Numerous studies have discovered a link between ethnic identification and numerous elements of personal well-being across ethnic groups (Phinney et al. 1997: 165–185). Many researchers have interpreted these persistent connections as evidence of causal mediation, with high ethnic identification thought to protect ethnic minority populations from suffering (Ponterotto & Park-Taylor 2007: 282-294). Thus, high degrees of ethnic identification should,

by definition, be connected with personal well-being.

The findings of a study revealed that ethnic identification had a negative connection with distress, with higher ethnic identity being associated with less suffering (Yip et al. 2019: 1274). Moreover, John Turner and his colleagues at the University of Bristol developed self-categorization theory and shared that self-categorizing is a necessary component of social identity theory.

Self-categorization theory explains how the cognitive process of categorization, when applied to oneself, provides a feeling of identification with the social category or group and manifests in the array of behaviours we attribute to group membership: conformity, stereotyping, ethnocentrism, and so on. Tajfel and Turner's (2004: 276-293) social identity theory proposes that individuals experience collective identity depending on their membership in a group, such as racial/ethnic and gender identities.

The greater identification with the in-group may symbolize a probable resource in dealing with threats from external factors, thus increasing in-group social support, but this may also present a source of threat if it hinders the process of adaptation (Oh et al. 2002: 511-526, Noh & Kaspar 2003: 232–238). Indeed, forging new social support networks and adapting to the cultural milieu of their adopted country has been related to successful acculturation (Utsey et al. 2002: 366).

Diego Henriquez and colleagues (2021) conducted a study on indicators of identity and psychological well-being in the immigrant population (Colombian migrants). According to their findings, collective self-esteem and ethnic identity have positive relationships with almost all dimensions of psychological well-being, whereas identity fusion with Colombia only had a positive relationship with the dimension positive relationships and identity fusion with Chile had a positive relationship with the dimension autonomy (Henriquez & Urzua 2021).

Timothy B. Smith and Lynda Silva (2011: 42) did a meta-analysis on ethnic identification and personal well-being in individuals of colour. After investigating the relationship between ethnic identity constructions and personal well-being among persons of colour in North America, they discovered that ethnic identity was more strongly related to positive well-being than to impaired well-being.

Several research findings appear to consistently point to the positive association between ethnic identity and multiple aspects of personal well-being across ethnic groups (Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz 1997: 165-185). Many of them have interpreted these consistent correlations to indicate causal mediation, with positive ethnic identity assumed to buffer against distress experienced by ethnic minority groups (Ponterotto & Park-Taylor 2007: 282-294).

This study seeks to investigate the correlation between ethnic identity and well-being among the Rai community in Sikkim, India, while also exploring

potential variations based on factors such as socio-economic status, age, and ancestral origin. Given India's diverse cultural milieu, understanding how ethnic identity impacts well-being within this minority group offers valuable insights into cultural dynamics and individual perceptions of life satisfaction. By integrating ancestral origin into the analysis, the study aims to delve deeper into the influence of historical roots and cultural heritage on identity formation and sense of belonging.

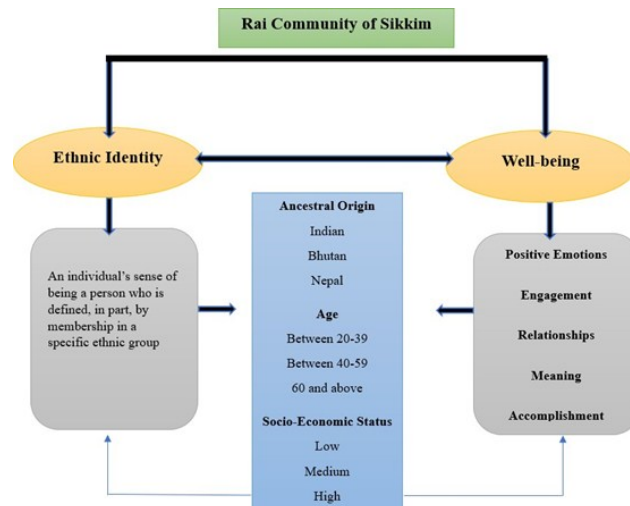


Figure 3: Framework of the Study

Objective

- To assess the association between ethnic identity and well-being among the Rai community in Sikkim.
- To examine how ethnic identity and well-being among differ significantly according to socio-economic status, age and ancestral origin of the Rai community in Sikkim.

Hypotheses

H1: Individuals high on ethnic identity would score high on well-being among the Rai community in Sikkim.

H2: Ethnic identity would significantly differ in different age groups among the Rai community in Sikkim.

H3: Well-being would significantly differ in different age groups among the Rai community in Sikkim.

H4: Ethnic identity would significantly differ in groups with different ancestral origins among the Rai community in Sikkim.

H5: Well-being would significantly differ in groups with different ancestral origins among the Rai community in Sikkim.

H6: There would be a significant impact of monthly income in ethnic identity among the Rai community in Sikkim.

H7: There would be a significant impact of monthly income in well-being among the Rai community in Sikkim.

Methods

This quantitative study used a survey method for the data collection, where the correlational and comparative research design was followed. The sample consisted of 120 participants from the Rai community of Sikkim state of India following the purposive sampling method.

The following inclusion criteria were taken for the selection of the sample:

- Only residents of Sikkim were considered for this study.
- Only participants with an ancestral origin in Bhutan, Nepal and India were considered.
- Only participants within the age range of 20 to 60 were considered.
- Only participants who are fluent in English or Nepali were considered for this study.

Instruments

Socio-demographic personal data sheet- Some of the relevant variables collected were age, gender, ancestral origin, level of education, nature of family, occupation, monetary source, and monthly income.

Ethnic Identity Scale: This scale is developed by Umana-Taylor, Yazedjian, & Bamaca-Gomez (2004). The scale measures three dimensions of ethnic identity, (a). Exploration, (b). Resolution, and (c). Affirmation. It is measured on a 4-point Likert Scale ranging from 1= “does not describe me at all” to 4= “describes me very well”. The reliability of each domain in Cronbach alpha is .91, .86, and .92, for exploration, resolution, and affirmation respectively.

PERMA Profiler: This scale is developed by developed by Butler and Kern (2019). It is a general measure, developed for adults, which measures five dimensions: (a). positive emotion, (b). engagement, (c). relationships, (d). meaning, and (e). accomplishment, following Dr. Seligman’s well-being theory. It is a 10-point scale ranging from 0= “never”, “terrible”, “not at all” to 10= “always”, “excellent”, “completely”. The reliability for each dimension is as follows: Positive emotion ($\alpha=.86$), Engagement ($\alpha=.57$), Relationships ($\alpha=.81$), Meaning ($\alpha=.86$), and Accomplishment ($\alpha=.78$). The validity for PERMA Profiler

in Spearman r is .81.

Procedure

A compilation of the consent form and demographic sheet was created. Participants were approached and rapport was formed. The questionnaire on ethnic identity and PERMA Profiler was then presented to the participants in a comfortable one-to-one setting. It was made sure that the participation was voluntary in nature and participants were assured of confidentiality of their responses. Each questionnaire was scored individually and the data was pooled in an Excel sheet.

Statistical Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlation was used to determine the correlation between Ethnic Identity and Well-being. This study used ANOVA for the comparison of Ethnic Identity and Well-being among different age groups, ancestral origin and monthly income. Relationships between the proposed variables were examined with the help of the SPSS v25.0

Results

Table 1: Socio-demographic details of the samples.

Variables		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	55	45.8
	Male	65	54.2
Age	Between 20-39	40	33.3
	Between 40-59	40	33.3
	60 & above	40	33.3
Ancestral Origin	India	35.0	35.0
	Bhutan	26.7	26.7
	Nepal	38.3	38.3
Level of Education	Never went to school	14	11.7
	Postgraduate	24	20.0
	Undergraduate	54	45.0
	School	28	23.3
Nature of Family	Extended Family	43	35.8
	Joint Family	24	20.0
	Nuclear Family	53	44.2
Occupation	Non- Working	37	30.8
	Working	59	49.2
	Student	24	20.0
Monthly Income	Low	11	9.2
	Medium	31	25.8
	High	78	65.0

Among the samples, the majority of the participants were males (54.2 per cent) and 45.8 per cent were females. 33.3 per cent of samples consisted of all three groups of age between 20- 39, 40- 59 and 60 above. Also, the majority

of the samples (38.3 per cent) have Nepal, 26.7 per cent have Bhutan as their ancestral origin in case of level of education, 45 per cent of the participants have an undergraduate degree, 23.3 have only a school degree and 20 per cent have a postgraduate degree. Furthermore, the nature of family has shown that 44.2 per cent of participants live in a nuclear family setup, and 20 per cent in a joint family setup, and terms of occupation, the majority of participants (49.2 per cent) belong to a working category, 30.8 per cent cent cent cent cent is non-working and 20 per cent belongs to student category. Finally, in terms of income, the majority of the participants (65 per cent) belong to a high-income category, 25.8 per cent from the medium-income category and 9.2 per cent of the samples belong to the low-income category.

Table 2: Means, standard deviations, and correlations between ethnic identity and well-being

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Ethnic Identity	34.71	5.30	-						
Well-being	7.05	.96	.043	-					
Positive Emotion	7.05	1.13	-.006	.858**	-				
Engagement	6.59	1.13	.027	.716**	.554**	-			
Relationships	7.62	1.28	.006	.837**	.661**	.458**	-		
Meaning	6.83	1.15	.064	.854**	.721**	.574**	.630**	-	
Accomplishment	6.94	1.15	.107	.740**	.497**	.375**	.567**	.525**	-

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 2 shows no significant correlation between Ethnic Identity and Well-being and the dimensions Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment ($p > 0.001$), hence rejecting the first hypothesis (H1).

Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviations and One-Way Analysis of Variance in Ethnic Identity

Test of Homogeneity of ANOVA						
Variances						
Age Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	Levene's Statistic	Sig	F	Sig
Between 20-39	35.38	6.242	2.083	.129	.513	.600
Between 40-59	34.20	4.810				
60 & above	34.55	4.798				

Table 3 shows a one-way ANOVA table that compares different age groups on ethnic identity, where, statistically no significant difference is found in ethnic identity among different age groups ($F(2, 117) = .513, p = 0.600$). Hence rejecting the hypothesis (H2).

Table 4: Mean, Standard Deviations and One-Way Analysis of Variance in well-being.

Test of Homogeneity of ANOVA						
Variances						
Age Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	Levene's Statistic	Sig	F	Sig
Between 20-39	6.7359	1.356	19.863	.000	2.693	.074
Between 40-59	7.2875	.651				
60 & above	7.1500	.640				

Table 4 shows a one-way ANOVA table that compares different age groups on Well-being, where, statistically no significant difference is found in ethnic identity among different age groups ($F(2,117) = 2.693$, $p = .074$). Hence rejecting the hypothesis (**H3**).

Table 5: Mean, Standard Deviations and One-Way Analysis of Variance in Ethnic Identity

Test of Homogeneity of ANOVA						
Variances						
AncestralOrigin	Mean	Std. Deviation	Levene's Statistic	Sig	F	Sig
Indian	35.14	6.182	1.712	.185	.276	.759
Bhutan	34.22	4.286				
Nepal	34.65	5.156				

Table 5 shows one-way ANOVA table that compares different Ancestral Origin on Well-being, where, statistically no significant difference is found in Ethnic Identity among different Ancestral Origin ($F(2,117) = 2.693$, $p = .074$). Hence hypothesis (**H4**) is not accepted.

Table 6: Mean, Standard Deviations and One-Way Analysis of Variance in Well-being.

Test of Homogeneity of ANOVA						
Variances						
AncestralOrigin	Mean	Std. Deviation	Levene's Statistic	Sig	F	Sig
India	6.790	1.164	2.720	.070	3.517	.033
Bhutan	7.377	.791				
Nepal	7.080	.811				
Group Differences						
Ancestral Origin	Mean Difference	Sig	95% confidence interval			
			LL	UL		
India- Bhutan	-.586	.025	-1.11	-.060		
Bhutan- Nepal	.296	.363	-.220	.813		
Nepal- India	.289	.325	-.189	.769		

Table 6 shows one-way ANOVA that compares well-being with respect to different ancestral origins. The result reveals that well-being significantly differs among individuals with different ancestral origin, ($F(2,117) = 3.517$, $p=.033$). Variation in well-being is accounted for 5.7% of the variation in ancestral origin. The results showed that the comparison of well-being in the participants with an ancestral origin of India and Bhutan is significant, $p=.025$, where higher well-being is found in participants having Bhutan as their ancestral origin ($M=7.37$, $SD=.791$) than the participants with Indian ancestral origin ($M=6.7902$, $SD=1.16411$). On the contrary, Tukeys's HSD test for multiple comparisons found that the mean value of well-being was not a statistically significant difference between Bhutan and Nepal ($p=.363$) and between Nepal and India ($p=.325$). Hence hypothesis (**H5**) is accepted.

Table 7: Mean, Standard Deviations and One-Way Analysis of Variance in Ethnic Identity

Test of Homogeneity of ANOVA						
Variances						
MonthlyIncome	Mean	Std. Deviation	Levene's Statistic	Sig	F	Sig
Low	38.27	5.061	.014	.986	2.946	.056
Middle	34.74	4.953				
High	34.19	5.341				

Table 7 shows one-way ANOVA that compares the effect of monthly income on ethnic identity. A one-way ANOVA revealed that there was not a statistically significant difference in ethnic identity in all three groups ($F(2,117) = 2.946$, $p=.056$). There was no statistically significant difference between low and middle ($p=.136$), middle and high ($p=.873$), and high and low income ($p=.044$), hence rejecting the hypothesis (**H6**).

Table 8: Mean, Standard Deviations and One-Way Analysis of Variance in Well-being

Test of Homogeneity of ANOVA						
Variances						
MonthlyIncome	Mean	Std. Deviation	Levene's Statistic	Sig	F	Sig
Low	7.096	1.401	.617	.541	.106	.899
Middle	7.119	.918				
High	7.028	.924				

Table 8 shows one-way ANOVA that compares the effect of monthly income on well-being. A one-way ANOVA revealed that there was not a statistically significant difference in well-being between at least two groups ($F(2,117) = .106$, $p=.899$). There was no statistically significant difference between

low and middle ($p=.998$, between middle and high ($p=.899$), and between high and low income ($p=.974$), hence rejecting hypothesis **(H7)**.

Discussion

The notion that subjective well-being is related to better self-reported health, longevity, and reduced pain is well known (Howell et al. 2007: 83-136, Diener & Chan 2011: 1-43), however the correlational finding of the present study suggested that there is no relationship between ethnic identity and well-being as per PERMA model. This could be because the PERMA model may not be capturing some of the factors that contribute to well-being that are unique to the particular culture (Khaw & Kern 2015: 10-23). This finding contradicts some previous results (Phinney et al. 2001: 493-510, Oliveira & Cabecinhas 2012: 33-42) which indicate that ethnic identity and other group orientations, which is understood as a sense of belonging and belonging to an ethnic group, has a positive correlation to helping individuals achieve subjective well-being.

Like many other ethnic groups, the Rai community is varied, with various subgroups having unique cultural traditions, beliefs, and socioeconomic origins. Ethnic identity is context-dependent and changing, not static (Seaton et al. 2017: 683-692). This flexibility within the Rai group is probably missed by the study's ethnic identification assessment metrics. The association between well-being and ethnic group identity may be impacted by factors including migration, intermarriage, and acculturation (Balidemaj & Small 2018: 712-730). A wide range of social and environmental factors, such as social support networks, access to healthcare, education, and career possibilities, also have an impact on wellbeing outcomes. It is important to contemplate if the research sufficiently accounts for these exogenous variables that might potentially skew the association between ethnic identification and well-being in the Rai community. Despite the absence of a direct correlation, the Rai community may possess cultural resilience and adaptive coping mechanisms that contribute to their overall well-being. Exploring Indigenous practices, community cohesion, and traditional healing methods could provide insights into alternative pathways to well-being within the Rai community.

The study results indicated that age and monthly income have no relevance to how connected an individual identifies. This could be because of environmental exposure around them influencing their development of personality and their identity. According to Ecological theory, development occurs within multiple, embedded contexts in which the individual exists (Bronfenbrenner 1989). The Cultural Ecological Model also suggests that a high proportion of ethnic minorities in a child's experience in their school and neighbourhood may contribute to making children feel more positively about their ethnicity (Coll et al., 1996: 1891-1914). Another factor could be the inclination towards acculturation as a driving force for the benefits the cultural adoption of other communities provides for people in weaker sections (Sesen

et al. 2024). Pursuing such action could be because minority group wants to adapt to their social surrounding, while they may, at the same time, be struggling to maintain their own ethnic identity, cultural customs and practices.

Studies generally show a U-shaped relationship between age and subjective well-being, though predicting this relationship can be complex (Blanchflower 2021: 575-624, Biermann et al., 2022: 100366). Adolescents' sense of purpose becomes more prosocial with age (Hill et al., 2010: 466-473). In collectivist cultures, people may prioritize communal happiness over personal happiness, enhancing their well-being. The Rais, influenced by Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity, maintain traditional practices like worshipping nature and ancestors, fostering social connectedness and a sense of belonging, which outweigh materialistic pursuits.

This study examined the impact of monthly income on ethnic identity and well-being, hypothesizing that lower income might limit education and employment opportunities, potentially affecting community affiliation. However, findings indicate no impact of income on ethnic identity or well-being. High-income individuals may use their resources for community upliftment, while low-income individuals exhibit strong cultural devotion. Similar research (Wyshak 2016) supports the lack of correlation between income and subjective well-being, and some studies (Wyshak 2013: 230-232, Kessler et al. 2015: 593-602) challenge the belief that economic status significantly influences depression.

In the context of the Rai community in Sikkim, where ethnic identity likely serves as a source of pride, belonging, and social cohesion, the absence of significant differences across age groups and income levels suggests a relatively stable and resilient ethnic identity within the community. This finding may indicate that Rai individuals, regardless of age or socioeconomic status, maintain a strong connection to their cultural heritage and identity, mitigating the potential erosion of ethnic identity that could result from acculturation processes. While the Acculturation Gap-Distress Theory primarily addresses intergenerational dynamics within immigrant families, its principles can be applied more broadly to understand the resilience of ethnic communities in maintaining cultural identity and well-being. In the context of the acculturation Gap-Distress Theory, where the Rai community in Sikkim showed no significant differences in well-being and ethnic identity across different age and income groups, it could imply that there is a relative lack of acculturation gaps within the community.

This suggests that regardless of age or income level, Rai individuals may share similar levels of cultural adaptation to the broader societal norms and values, thereby reducing the potential for intergenerational or socioeconomic disparities in acculturation and its associated distress. This suggests that the community has effectively managed potential acculturation

gaps, fostering a sense of cultural continuity and collective identity that promotes well-being and adaptation across generations and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The present study hypothesized that there would be a significant difference in well-being among the Rai community in Sikkim with different ancestral origin, where the findings suggest that individuals whose lineage is Bhutan are more likely to experience better well-being compared to those of Indian origin. It is in conjunction with previous studies that investigated the etiology of subjective well-being which showed that there are significant heritability estimates in the range of 40–50%. The remaining variance was accounted for by environmental influences unique to an individual (Nes et al. 2006: 1033-1042). Therefore, it could be argued that the social and environmental factors of Bhutan provide a protective buffer that helps the people of Bhutan cope with any potential problems, and thus possibly have helped the people of Bhutan to maintain a sense of well-being, despite any economic or geographic limitations (Biswas-Diener & Diener 2015). These findings underscore the multifaceted interplay of ancestral origins, cultural contexts, and contemporary influences on well-being outcomes within the Rai community. The higher well-being value of Bhutan-origin Rai people could be because of the cultural, socioeconomic, or environmental influences unique to Bhutan that promote better mental and physical health outcomes among its descendants within the Rai community. It also shows how specific cultural and historical contexts shape individual and community well-being (Allison 2024).

Whereas, Nepalese culture is a combination of Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Mongolian culture, meaning that is highly influenced by Hindu and Buddhist traditions (Khan 2022: 470-486), hence showing similarity with Indian culture contributing to the non-significant difference in well-being among the Rai people of Bhutan and Nepal origin. Also, the findings of non-significant differences in well-being among Nepal and Indian-origin Rai communities could be due to this uniform impact of South Asian cultural heritage on well-being outcomes, highlighting the need to discern more nuanced distinctions within this diverse ancestral landscape.

Conclusion

The study focused on investigating the relationship between ethnic identity and well-being among members of the Rai community, taking into account factors such as age, income, and ancestral lineage. Despite thorough analysis, the results indicate a lack of significant correlation between ethnic identity and well-being, regardless of all demographic variables, except for ancestral origin. Well-being is significantly found different among individuals with different ancestral origin, where Rai community with an ancestral origin of India, Bhutan and Nepal was compared and well-being was found to be significantly different in India and Bhutan ancestral origin, where higher mean

of well-being is found in people with Bhutan ancestral origin. This suggests that ethnic identity among the Rai community is intricate and resistant to straightforward hypotheses. Therefore, a more comprehensive understanding of ethnic identity requires exploration through alternative variables or qualitative methods. It is apparent that individual life experiences and social contexts significantly shape the concept of well-being.

Implication

Researches available on ethnicity usually validate the importance of ethnic identity during the formative stage for teenagers and young adults, but there is an absence of research on other age groups. The present study will contribute to developing an understanding of the importance of ethnic identity in older age groups and its implication on well-being specific to the Rai community. The findings of this study can also be useful in preparing a proposal to preserve the culture and language of different cultures; understanding the problem of minorities and suggesting ways to overcome them; formulating policies to uplift the conditions of the ethnic minorities and bring them at par with majority communities; and sensitize the public about different ethnic groups and their unique language and culture and avoid discrimination.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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