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Correlation of Personality Traits with Happiness among University Students

Physiology Section

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Nowadays, happiness has changed into one of the indices of development in society. The significance of happiness doubles when it comes to lively strata of university students.

Aim: The present study was aimed to investigate the relationship between the five-factor model of personality traits and happiness among the students of Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, Kermanshah, Iran in 2015.

Materials and Methods: In this descriptive-correlational study, 350 students of Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences were selected through stratified random sampling. For data collection, a demographic questionnaire, the revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R) and Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI) were used. Data were analysed through descriptive statistics (percentage, mean, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis). Further, the SPSS statistics software V.21 was utilised for data analysis.

Results: The results of correlation analyses demonstrated that there was a significant positive relationship between happiness ($p<0.001$) and each of the personality trait dimensions of extraversion ($p<0.001$, $r=0.594$), agreeableness ($p<0.001$, $r=0.431$), neuroticism ($p<0.001$, $r=0.368$), conscientiousness ($p<0.001$, $r=0.351$), and openness to experience ($p<0.001$, $r=0.151$). Additionally, the results of regression analysis showed that aside from openness to experience, the other four dimensions of personality traits could significantly predict the changes of happiness ($p<0.001$).

Conclusion: To extend happiness among university students, the personality traits can be adjusted to some extent. Therefore, if the extension of happiness is high on the lists of managers, it can be influenced in different ways, and the personality traits can be developed with the help of various management techniques.

Keywords: Medical students, NEO personality inventory, Oxford happiness inventory, Personality characteristics

INTRODUCTION

According to many theories of emotion, happiness is one of the six major emotions, that is, happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise and disgust [1]. The quest for happiness is an important goal for many people, and growing emphasis is placed on happiness as a component of health by the World Health Organization [2].

According to the theory of personality by Eysenck SB et al., happiness is a personality variable for which a biological basis can be considered [3]. With regard to personality and happiness, it seems that the individual differences in happiness are largely related to personality differences, probably ensuing from the genetic factors [4].

In this regard, Yang Y believes that feeling of happiness, joy and continuity of new experiences are sensed through extraversion [5]. One of the psychological needs of mankind is happiness, thereby always occupying the mind of human beings due to its major effects on people's lives. Additionally, vitality and happiness are the basic and essential human needs which can be considered the key factors in the health of families and societies. It should be noted that hope and effort are in the light of a happy and joyful life [6]. Besides, introverts do not have to be very much stimulated to reach an optimal level of arousal and avoid severe stimulation, while extraverts need to be highly stimulated to reach an optimal level of arousal [4].

In other words, the Behavioural Activation System (BAS) is linked to extraversion and regulates the approach-related behaviour by signaling the presence of rewards through the promotion of positive effect. Further, the Behavioural Inhibition System (BIS) is connected to extraversion and regulates the avoidance behaviour by signaling the presence of punishment through the promotion of negative effect. Thus, extraverts pay special attention to those who reward them with something, and it is for this reason that they see themselves positive, whereas neurotics pay attention to punishers, and that is why they see themselves negative [7]. In support of the perspective by Eysenck SB et al., the results of studies conducted by Aghamohammadi M and Asgari S and Strobel M et al., demonstrated that personality traits and emotional modes were related [3,8,9]. To look into the factors associated with happiness, researchers refer to the significant positive relationship between happiness and extraversion as well as between neuroticism, depression and bad temper [10,11]. To cite some examples in this respect, the results of two studies suggested that there was a significant relationship between happiness and each of the dimensions of personality traits, that is to say, neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience [12,13]. Garousi Farshi MT et al., concluded that there was a significant positive relationship between happiness and extraversion as well as conscientiousness and agreeableness attributes, whereas there was a significant negative relationship between happiness and neuroticism [14]. Besides, it was revealed that happiness and openness to experience were negatively related. In a study done by Premuzic TC et al., the relationships between the five-factor model of personality, emotional intelligence and happiness were investigated [15]. The results indicated that there was a positive relationship between the emotional intelligence and happiness and each of the factors of neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness and neuroticism correlates so strongly with negative affect that they can be considered equivalents, and neuroticism and happiness are strongly correlated [16].

Given that human beings have multiple personality traits, the question that arises here is, which of the traits or personality constituents have more to do with happiness or can be a better predictor of happiness. Therefore, conducting a study in this regard among students can provide valuable results. Hence, the present study aimed to investigate the relationship between the five-factor model of personality traits and happiness among the students of Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, Kermanshah, Iran in 2015.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was descriptive and correlational, and the statistical population consisted of all students majoring in Medicine, Paramedicine, Nursing and Midwifery in the second semester of the academic year 2014-2015. Further, the sample size was determined through Cochran's sample size formula [17] (n=350), and given the anticipated likelihood of sample dropouts and lack of cooperation, 400 subjects were entered into the study and were selected through stratified random sampling (217 females and 133 males). The inclusion criteria were consenting to participate in the research and studying in the second semester of the academic year 2014-2015, while handing over incomplete questionnaires was the exclusion criterion. Fifty students were excluded from the study due to incompletion of the questionnaires.

As for data collection, a demographic questionnaire, the revised NEO PI-R [18] and OHI were used [19]. The demographic questionnaire consisted of five questions on gender, age, major, degree, and domicile. The big five personality traits questionnaire is one of the personality tests developed by McCrae RR and Costa PT through analysing factors [18]. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each of the dimensions was as follows: neuroticism (0.91), extraversion (0.78), openness to experience (0.73), agreeableness (0.76), and conscientiousness (0.86).

The big five personality traits questionnaire: This instrument consisted of 60 questions with five-point Likert scale (0=strongly disagree, 1=disagree, 2=neutral, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree) and five dimensions: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Besides, each of the dimension consisted of 12 items. Finally, five scores were obtained and the total score of the questionnaire was in the range of 0-240.

The Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI): This instrument, first introduced by Argyle M and Lu L, is one of the most popular instruments in the field of self-evaluation, which has been used in most of the studies into happiness [19,20]. This questionnaire consisted of 29 questions with four-point Likert scale (1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Always) and five dimensions: satisfaction with life, self-esteem, subjective well-being, satisfaction, and positive mood. The total score of the questionnaire was in the range of 0-87.

To commence the study, the required permits were obtained from the Vice Chancellery for the Department of Research and Technology at Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences and the deans of the selected colleges.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

To determine the normal distribution of data, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was applied. Further, to determine the relationship between the different dimensions of personality traits and happiness, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used. In addition, the Pearson correlation coefficient with repeated measures and stepwise multiple regression was used to predict the level of happiness based on the dimensions of personality traits. All tests were analysed through the SPSS statistics software V.21 at the significance level of 0.05 (p<0.001).

RESULTS

In the present study, of the total 350 subjects under study, 217 (62%) subjects were male, and most (150, 42.9%) of the subjects were in the age range of 18-20 years. The mean±SD age of the study subjects was 21.2±85.66 years. In terms of education, over half of the samples were undergraduate students (189 subjects or 54%), and most subjects were majoring in nursing and midwifery. Moreover, in terms of the domicile, nearly over half of the samples were living in dormitories [Table/Fig-1].

The mean±SD score for the students' personality traits were 3.40±0.17, indicating that the status of their personality traits was average. As for the dimensions of the personality traits, the results demonstrated that neuroticism (mean±SD=3.48±0.29) and extraversion (mean±SD=3.31±0.36) had the highest and lowest means, respectively [Table/Fig-2].

Variables	Groups	Number (%)
Gender	Male	217 (62%)
	Female	133 (38%)
Age (years)	18-20	150 (42.9%)
	21-23	88 (25.1%)
	24-26	112 (32%)
Education	Associate's degree	23 (6.6%)
	Bachelor's degree	189 (54%)
	Master's degree	28 (8%)
	Ph.D.	110 (31.4%)
Field of study	Medicine	110 (31.4%)
	Paramedics	112 (32%)
	Nursing and Midwifery	128 (36.6%)
Domicile	Dormitory	168 (48%)
	Rental	69 (19.7%)
	Personal	113 (32.3%)

[Table/Fig-1]: The participants' demographic characteristics.

Statistical indicators	Variables	Mean	SD	Ranking
Personality Traits	Neuroticism	3.48	0.29	First
	Openness to experience	3.45	0.31	Second
	Conscientiousness	3.42	0.31	Third
	Agreeableness	3.35	0.33	Fourth
	Extraversion	3.31	0.36	Fifth
	Total personality traits	3.40	0.17	-
Happiness	Self-esteem	3.47	0.38	First
	Satisfaction	3.45	0.47	Second
	Satisfaction with life	3.36	0.36	Third
	Positive mood	3.33	0.51	Fourth
	Subjective well-being	3.32	0.50	Fifth
	Total happiness	3.38	0.25	-

[Table/Fig-2]: The mean, standard deviation, minimum score, maximum score, and the participants' rankings.

As for happiness, the results revealed that the mean±SD for the students' happiness was 3.38±0.25, and the dimensions of self-esteem and subjective well-being had the highest and lowest means, respectively [Table/Fig-2].

Moreover, as for the relationship between the personality traits and happiness, the results of the Pearson correlation coefficient indicated that there was a significant positive relationship between the total personality traits and total happiness (r=0.728, p<0.001). Additionally, extraversion was strongly correlated with happiness (r=0.594, p<0.001), while openness to experience had the lowest correlation with happiness (r= 0.151, p<0.001) [Table/Fig-3].

Hypothesis	Independent variable	Dependent variable	Correlation coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)
1	Extraversion	Happiness	0.594**	p<0.001
2	Agreeableness	Happiness	0.431**	p<0.001
3	Neuroticism	Happiness	0.368**	p<0.001
4	Conscientiousness	Happiness	0.351**	p<0.001
5	Openness to experience	Happiness	0.151**	p<0.001
6	Total personality traits	Total Happiness	0.728**	p<0.001

[Table/Fig-3]: The correlation coefficients between each of the dimensions of personality traits and happiness.
**Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).

The results of multiple regression analysis showed that, out of the five variables that were entered in the equation, the four significant dimensions of extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism and conscientiousness remained in the final model, and the dimension of openness to experience was eliminated.

Given the beta coefficient of each of the dimensions, conscientiousness (β=0.559), extraversion (β=0.313), neuroticism (β=0.268) and agreeableness (β=0.155) could significantly explain the level of happiness. Having compared the standardised coefficients, the results revealed that conscientiousness (β=0.559) and agreeableness (β=0.155) had the highest and lowest effects on the dependent variable of happiness, respectively. Finally, it was concluded that the best predictors of happiness were conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, and agreeableness, respectively [Table/Fig-4].

Personality trait dimensions	Unstandardised coefficients		R	R^2	Standardised coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			Beta		
(Constant)	0.047	0.171	-	-	-	0.279	p<0.001
Conscientiousness	0.418	0.026	0.594	0.352	0.559	16.074	p<0.001
Extraversion	0.215	0.024	0.703	0.492	0.313	8.816	p<0.001
Neuroticism	0.229	0.030	0.752	0.561	0.268	7.590	p<0.001
Agreeableness	0.125	0.028	0.767	0.584	0.155	4.463	p<0.001

[Table/Fig-4]: The multiple regression analysis for predicting happiness through the personality traits.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between the five-factor model of personality traits and happiness among the students of Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, Kermanshah, Iran in 2015. The results of the present study showed that the status of the students' personality traits was average, and the dimensions of neuroticism and extraversion had the highest and lowest means, respectively. This result was concurrent with the results of studies conducted by Aghamohammadi M and Asgari S on the Irish nursing students, Abedi GH et al., on students at Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences, Mousavi Moghadam SR et al., on students at Ilam University of Medical Sciences, Salimi M on the students at Payam-E-Noor University of Behbahan, and Whitney LG et al., on the students at the University of Edinburgh [8,21-24].

As for happiness, the results of the present study revealed that the mean±SD score for students' happiness was average (3.38±0.25), and self-esteem and subjective well-being had the highest and lowest means, respectively. Asgari P et al., and Shafiq S et al., reported that the mean score of happiness was satisfactory, which was consistent with the results of the present study [25,26].

The findings of the present study were indicative of a significant positive relationship between the total personality traits and total happiness. Furthermore, extraversion was strongly correlated with happiness, while openness to experience had the lowest correlation with happiness. Strobel M et al., and Garousi Farshi MT et al., remarked that there was a positive and relatively high correlation between extraversion and happiness, and from the viewpoint of these researchers, extraversion was the best predictor of happiness [9,14]. So, it can be concluded that the extraverts with emotional stability feel happier. Adrian F and Irene C., analysed the relationship between extraversion and happiness and found out that the main aim of extraversion was happiness, pursuit of pleasure and enjoyment of life's opportunities [27]. According to Gupta SD and Kumar D, extraversion leads to enjoyment and participation in social activities [28]. Therefore, it can be assumed that extraverts are happier because they share their inner feelings with others and concentrate on different things rather than focus only on negative experiences.

In the present study, there was a significant relationship between conscientiousness and happiness (r=0.351). In other words, the higher one's conscientiousness, the happier one will be. This result was concurrent with the results of other studies [13,15,29]. However, this result was inconsistent with the results of studies performed by Momeni M et al., Furnham A and Irene CH and Soto CJ and Luhmann M [4,30,31]. To further explain this part, it can be said that conscientiousness leads to happiness through laying the groundwork for success. Also, these people have more mental health and fewer physical illnesses due to their self-control, sufficiency and endeavour to succeed [32].

The results of the present study showed that there was a significant positive relationship between extraversion and happiness (r=0.594), indicating that it is a good predictor of happiness. In other words, the ones with better score of extraversion will be happier. This result was consistent with the results of other studies [27,33-35], while it was inconsistent with the results of studies performed by Salimi M and Momeni M et al., [23,30]. Furnham A and Irene CH had found that the correlation between neuroticism and happiness was 0.44, and neuroticism and negative emotions were found to be strongly correlated [4]. In addition, these two variables were considered equivalent. Aghamohammadi M and Asgari S showed that there was a negative relationship between neuroticism and happiness [8]. Neuroticism is accompanied by negative feelings, such as fear, sadness, arousal, anger, guilt, persistent and pervasive feelings of frustration and vulnerability.

In the present study, agreeableness and happiness were positively correlated (r=0.431), which was consistent with the results of studies performed by Francis LJ et al., and Aziz R et al., [16,36]. Agreeableness is the ability to adapt to one's and the others' conditions. This variable is basically based on altruism, compassion and interest in assisting the others [36]. A high score in this index denotes Dependent Personality Disorder (DPD), and a low score in this regard represents Paranoid Personality Disorder (PPD) and antisocial streaks, whereas average scores provide a good estimate of the status of one's balanced personality [18].

LIMITATION

Not to mention, the present study had several limitations. Firstly, the data were collected through the self-reporting methods, possibly affecting the accuracy of the results. Secondly, because of the individual differences of the research samples, the generalisability of the results may be affected. Finally, given the individual differences of the samples, it is recommended that further studies be carried out in this regard to draw comparisons towards reaching a consensus on this matter.

CONCLUSION

All the five personality traits significantly correlated with happiness, and conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism and agreeableness were the best predictor variables and could explain happiness. The findings of the present study can be used to raise awareness about the relationship between personality and happiness with the aim of extending joy and happiness in society and its sub-categories. Hence, given the major roles of personality traits in collegiate environments, it is suggested that the type of personality that influences happiness the most be further investigated in the form of comparative studies.

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