



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Correlation between personality traits and coping strategies of young adults in India

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Abstract

The present work aims to investigate the correlation between personality traits and coping strategies among young adults in India. Correlational and ex-post facto research designs were employed on a sample of 126 young adults (61 males and 65 females) between 18 to 35 years old. Personality traits and coping strategies were measured using NEO five-factor inventory and coping strategies. It was hypothesized that; (a) There will be a significant correlation between personality traits and coping strategies of young adults; (b) There will be significant differences in coping strategies between young adult males and females; (c) There will be a significant difference in personality traits between young adult males and females. The data was analyzed using Pearson correlation and t-tests. Results demonstrated a significant correlation between the two variables. Additionally, a significant difference between males and females has been found in behavior avoidance coping strategies and personality traits of openness and agreeableness.

Keywords: Personality, Big five personality traits, Coping strategies, Gender differences, NEO five-factor inventory.

Introduction

The individual's personality is an important aspect that substantially impacts all psychological processes, including stress. Some features could assist healthy coping, such as seeking help from others and sustaining a positive mindset. Other personality qualities contribute to avoidance, which may contribute to negative mental and physical symptoms of stress.

Personality

Gordon Allport (1937) definition of personality states, "*Personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psycho-physical systems that determine his unique adjustment to his environment.*"

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Five-Factor Model of Personality

Also referred to as big five personality traits, which Costa and McCrae developed, have become one of the most widely accepted theories on personality structure. The five-factor model proposes five broad traits: Openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism.

Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping

The cognitive theory of stress, presented by Lazarus and his colleagues, states that stress is assessed at two levels. Primary assessment is when a person decides whether changes brought by stressors in their life are threat, harm, or challenge. The secondary appraisal then evaluates the resource availability (physical, mental, social, or financial) and capacity to cope with the situation.

Understanding Coping Strategies

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) give the definition for the presented work: "*Coping can be understood as a dynamic, situation-specific reaction to stress.*" The first function is managing emotions caused by the stressor (emotion-focused coping or passive coping), and the second function is actively changing the stressor components to deal with the issue causing the stress (problem-focused coping or active coping). The success of coping strategies depends on how the individual perceives the stressor and their personal characteristics. An individual's secondary evaluation influences the choice of coping strategy.

Relationship between Personality Traits and Coping Strategies

Fornés-Vives *et al.* (2016) and Besharat (2007) emphasized the relationship between personality traits and coping strategies in university students, emphasizing the impact of certain features on how individuals deal with stress. Extraversion and conscientiousness are favorable predictors of well-being, while neuroticism is associated with bad emotions, according to Malkoç (2011) and Kardum & Hudek-Kneevi (1996). Murberg (2009) and Haren and Mitchell (2003) investigate the impact of personality factors on coping methods, indicating that coping styles contribute to variation in outcomes and emphasizing possible gender and age-related correlations. Matud (2004) examines gender differences and discovers that women suffer greater chronic and everyday pressures and employ more emotion-focused coping mechanisms than males. Numerous researchers have looked at personality trait stability over time and gender variations. Schmitt *et al.* (2016) challenged the social role hypothesis by findings that demonstrate that countries with higher gender equality tend to have more pronounced gender variations in personality. In their study of the stability of personality traits from childhood to old age, Harris *et al.* (2016) discovered that while certain attributes stay constant throughout time, others go through major alterations. McCrae *et al.* (1999) conducted cross-cultural research, which discovered that agreeableness and conscientiousness rise with age whereas neuroticism, extraversion, and openness tend to deteriorate. Males scored somewhat higher on self-esteem and assertiveness, according to Feingold's (1994) research on gender differences, while females scored higher on extraversion, anxiety, trust, and tender-mindedness. Gender differences have been researched extensively; Pierceall and Keim (2007) discovered that female students at community colleges in southern Illinois reported greater stress levels than male students. Hampel and Petermann (2005) studied coping processes in children and adolescents and discovered that girls used more maladaptive coping techniques than boys. On the other hand, Gallagher (1996) examined graduate students' coping patterns in the face of academic stress, emphasizing the link between introversion and coping mechanisms that lead to greater academic accomplishment. Jorgensen and Dusek (1990) evaluated coping techniques and psychosocial adjustment in college freshmen, discovering that those who used a larger proportion of positive coping attempts had better psychosocial adjustment. Kato and Pedersen (2005) investigated the impact of genetic and environmental variables on stress-coping methods in middle-aged and older adult twins, discovering modest genetic influences and considerable gender differences.

Rationale

The researcher was intrigued by how people handle stress and problems in their lives and wanted to study if these

differences in coping styles could be attributed to different personality types. A review of related literature suggested a significant correlation between personality and coping strategies. However, work was scarce in this field by Indian researchers, especially in relation to the young adult population. Therefore, the researcher chose to contribute to the Indian body of literature for personality and coping strategies.

Methodology

The objective of the present study was to investigate the correlation between personality traits and coping strategies among young adults in India. The research hypotheses were: (a) There will be a significant correlation between personality traits and coping strategies of young adults. (b) There will be significant differences in coping strategies between young adult males and females. (c) There will be a significant difference in personality traits between young adult males and females. Stress coping strategies and personality traits were measured through the coping strategies scale and NEO five-factor inventory, respectively. Employing a correlational design, the research involved 126 participants, including 65 females and 61 males aged 18 to 35 years. Purposive sampling was used, with inclusion criteria (Indian nationality, age, comprehension ability, willingness) and exclusion criteria (age, nationality, comprehension ability, health conditions, unwillingness). Pearson correlation and t-tests were applied to explore relationships and gender-based differences in coping strategies and personality traits.

Results and Discussion

To fulfil the objective of the present study the correlation between personality traits and coping strategies and t-test among young adults was initiated. Table 1 is describing the correlation between personality traits and coping strategies.

According to the results, openness and agreeableness are negatively correlated with behavioral avoidance coping at 0.01 and 0.05 level of significance, respectively. In other words, young adults who are more intellectual, creative, and explorative or who demonstrate various prosocial qualities such as empathy, warmth, trustworthiness, and care tend not to utilize behaviors avoidance coping such as distraction from problem source or excessive indulgence religion to cope with stressful situations. Extroversion is positively correlated with behavior avoidance and behavior cognitive approach coping at 0.05 significance level. In other words, social, outgoing, energetic, and talkative individuals tend to cope not only through indulgence in avoidant behavioral coping but also with more approach-oriented cognitive coping strategies such as cognitive restructuring to promote optimistic outlook, problem-solving behavior or seeking social support. Neuroticism is negatively correlated with the behavior cognitive approach at 0.05 significance level and positively correlated with cognitive avoidance coping

Table 1: Correlation between personality traits and coping strategies

		<i>Behavior avoidance</i>	<i>Behavior approach</i>	<i>Cognitive approach</i>	<i>Behavior cognitive approach</i>	<i>Cognitive avoidance</i>
Neuroticism	Pearson correlation	0.031	0.037	0.001	-0.215*	0.264**
	sig. (2-tailed)	0.730	0.682	0.994	0.016	0.003
	N	126	126	126	126	126
Extroversion	Pearson correlation	0.178*	0.135	0.119	0.205*	0.102
	sig. (2-tailed)	0.046	0.133	0.183	0.021	0.255
	N	126	126	126	126	126
Openness	Pearson correlation	-0.250**	-0.113	0.141	0.070	0.026
	sig. (2-tailed)	0.005	0.207	0.115	0.433	0.775
	N	126	126	126	126	126
Agreeableness	Pearson correlation	-0.217*	-0.152	-0.095	0.133	-0.003
	sig. (2-tailed)	0.015	0.088	0.292	0.138	0.970
	N	126	126	126	126	126
Conscientiousness	Pearson correlation	-0.183*	0.013	-0.016	0.213*	-0.277**
	sig. (2-tailed)	0.040	0.886	0.857	0.017	0.002
	N	126	126	126	126	126

Note.

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 2: t-Test comparing scores on coping strategies and personality trait of males and females

	<i>Gender</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>	<i>t</i>
Behaviour avoidance coping	Male	61	27.49	6.508	3.301**
	Female	65	23.86	5.833	
Behaviour approach coping	Male	61	32.11	5.517	1.378
	Female	65	30.80	5.197	
Cognitive approach coping	Male	61	13.95	2.741	0.305
	Female	65	14.09	2.460	
Behaviour cognitive approach coping	Male	61	15.59	3.977	0.487
	Female	65	15.26	3.594	
Cognitive avoidance coping	Male	61	4.16	1.416	0.936
	Female	65	4.45	1.912	
Neuroticism personality trait	Male	61	37.02	6.543	1.671
	Female	65	39.14	7.630	
Extroversion personality trait	Male	61	39.72	4.216	1.810
	Female	65	38.14	5.474	
Openness personality trait	Male	61	36.80	5.329	3.086**
	Female	65	39.66	5.069	
Agreeableness personality trait	Male	61	35.98	6.236	3.272**
	Female	65	39.42	5.534	
Contentiousness personality trait	Male	61	41.64	6.221	0.470
	Female	65	41.11	6.452	

Note.

*Significant difference at the 0.05 level

**significant difference at the 0.01 level

at 0.01 significance level. This indicates that individuals with emotional instability tend not to indulge in coping that directly addresses the stressor but rather employ coping that helps them avoid or suppress threatening/unwanted thoughts and emotions through rationalization, distraction, or cognitive restructuring. Lastly, conscientiousness was also observed to be positively correlated with behavior cognitive approach coping at 0.05 significance level and negatively correlated with behavior avoidance and cognitive avoidance at 0.05 and 0.01 significance level, respectively. This suggests that individuals who are systematic, diligent, responsible, and organized tend to employ approach-oriented coping and refrain from avoidance-oriented coping, in other words, under a stressful situation, these individuals will try to directly address that stressor with the help of cognition and behavior such as problem-solving, planning, social support seeking, and so on. Thus, individuals scoring high on the personality trait of conscientiousness demonstrated extremely adaptive coping strategies.

The study's findings are consistent with earlier research that highlighted the influence of personality traits on coping strategies and add to the evidence that these factors impact how people deal with stress. The findings support the idea that individuals with certain personality traits tend to utilize particular coping strategies more frequently. Consistent with previous research by Fornés-Vives *et al.* (2016), Besharat (2007), and Matud (2004), this study found that openness and agreeableness were negatively correlated with behavioral avoidance coping. This implies that individuals who are more open to experiences and demonstrate prosocial qualities are less likely to engage in avoidance-oriented coping strategies. Similarly, extraversion was positively correlated with behavior avoidance and behavior cognitive approach coping, in line with extroverted individuals' inclination to utilize both avoidant and approach-oriented cognitive coping strategies. The positive correlation between conscientiousness and behavior cognitive approach coping supports previous findings by Malkoç (2011) and Kardum & Hudek-Kneevi (1996), suggesting that individuals with greater conscientiousness are more likely to employ adaptive coping methods involving problem-solving and planning. Furthermore, the positive correlation between neuroticism and cognitive avoidance coping resonates with past research, indicating that emotionally unstable individuals are prone to employing strategies that avoid or suppress stress-inducing thoughts and emotions (Malkoç, 2011). These consistent patterns across various personality traits and coping strategies highlight the robustness of these relationships and underscore the importance of considering personality traits when understanding individual coping behaviors.

The hypotheses "There will be significant correlation between personality traits and coping strategies of young adults", is therefore accepted.

Table 2 is explaining t-test comparing scores on coping strategies and personality trait of males and females.

It was found that behavior avoidance coping has a significant difference between young adult males and females ($t = 3.301$, $p < 0.01$) with females scoring higher mean average than males, in other words females tend to employ behavior avoidance coping significantly more than males in stressful scenarios. This means that under stressful conditions, females are more likely to engage in coping, altering their behaviors to avoid thinking about, experiencing, or doing challenging tasks. This may include feelings of helplessness, tendency to seek distraction, indulging in religion, or inhibition to act. However, there is no significant difference between young adult males and females in India on behavior approach, cognitive approach, behavior cognitive approach and cognitive avoidance coping strategies.

The hypothesis "There will be a significant difference in coping strategies between young adult males and females", is accepted for behavior avoidance but rejected for behavior approach, cognitive approach, behavior cognitive approach and cognitive avoidance coping strategies.

It was found that personality traits of openness and agreeableness has a significant difference between young adult males and females ($t = 3.086$, $p < 0.01$ and $t = 3.272$, $p < 0.01$), with females scoring higher mean average than males on both personality traits, in other words, females tend to be significantly more open to experiences than males, suggesting that young adult females demonstrate a wider range of interests, inquisitive nature and greater inventiveness and spontaneity. Additionally, young adult females are significantly more agreeable than males, suggesting that they demonstrate various prosocial qualities such as empathy, warmth, trustworthiness, and care. However, there is no significant difference between young adult males and females on neuroticism, extraversion, and conscientiousness.

Consistent with studies like Matud (2004) and Pierceall and Keim (2007), the present study revealed that young adult females tend to employ behaviour avoidance coping more frequently than their male counterparts. This finding emphasizes females' potential vulnerability to engage in avoidance strategies during stressful situations. In terms of personality traits, the study revealed that young adult females scored considerably higher than males on openness and agreeableness. This is consistent with prior studies indicating that females have higher levels of emotional expressiveness, empathy, and receptivity to new experiences (Feingold, 1994). The findings are also consistent with McCrae *et al.* (1999), who reported gender differences in traits such as trust and tender-mindedness, with females scoring higher. The study, however, found no significant gender differences in neuroticism, extraversion,

or conscientiousness. This conclusion contradicts Feingold's (1994) research, which found that females had greater levels of extraversion than males.

The hypothesis "There will be a significant difference in personality traits between young adult males and females", is therefore accepted for personality trait of openness and agreeableness but rejected for personality traits of neuroticism, extroversion, and conscientiousness.

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