WCLTA 2010

Personality traits, religious orientation and happiness

Ghavam. Moltafet*, Mohammed .Mazidi, Somayeh, Sadati

Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between personality traits and happiness with religious orientation as a mediator. The sample consisted of 301 Shiraz university students (110 male and 191 female) selected by applying a cluster random sampling method. Participants completed three questioners: NEO-FFI or short personality inventory of Costa and Mc Crae (1992); Intrinsic-Extrinsic Religious Orientation Scale (IEROS, Allport & Ross, 1967); and The Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI Argyle; Martin& Crossland, 1989). Results of multiple regression revealed that Extraversion, and Intrinsic religious orientation were positive predictors of happiness, in contrast to Neuroticism which predicted happiness negatively. Also results showed that Religion orientation played the mediation role between these relationships. This explanatory model is elaborated in the article.

© 2010 Elsevier Ltd. Open access under CC BY-NC-ND license.

Keywords: big five, personality traits, extrinsic religious orientation, intrinsic religious orientation, happiness

1. Introduction

During the last century, researchers and psychologists have mostly emphasized on disappointment and unhappiness conditions of human being such as anxiety and depression rather than their positive strengths and potentialities. In recent years, especially since Martin Seligman has been appointed as the APA president, a gradual trend has appeared in researchers’ attitudes toward the positive aspects of human strengths (Furnham and Cheng, 2000; khanzadeh, Moltafet, and Sadati, 2007). For instance, within the last decade some psychologists and researchers have tried to bring some new definitions for the happiness. In conceptualization of happiness Argyle (1989, 2001) defined happiness as having three independent components included: (1) the average level of satisfaction over a specific time period; (2) the frequency and degree of positive effects; and (3) the relative absence of negative effects. Review of the literature shows that an individual with high score on extraversion and/or low on neuroticism tend to show more happiness (Eysenck, 1990; Argyle, 1990; Furnham and Cheng, 2000; Francies and Robbin, 2000; khanzadeh, Moltafet, and Sadati, 2007). Religion constructs has been found on of the predictors of happiness. For instance, some, researchers have demonstrated that individuals differ in their religious orientation and that these differences are related to variations in personality, happiness, religious experience and religious and nonreligious attitudes (Altemeyer & hunsberger, 1992; Allport & Ross ,1967;and Maltby ,1999). Allport & Ross(1967) has proposed two main religious orientations: intrinsic and extrinsic. Individuals with an intrinsic	

E-mail address:rezamoltafet@yahoo.com.
orientation toward religion were described as wholly committed toward their religious beliefs and that religiosity was evident in every aspects of their life. On the other hand, those with an extrinsic orientation used religion as a means to provide participation in a powerful in–group protection, consolation and social status (Allport & Ross, 1967). This difference between religious orientations is said to be related to personality traits, and these difference have an effect on happiness. For example, Saroglou (2002) In a Meta–analysis study, using the five factors model of personality as a framework, found that general religiosity was related to extroversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness. He found that Intrinsic religious, was related to low agreeableness, low neuroticism and low openness, while extrinsic religion was related to neuroticism.

Researchers and practitioners in various fields of study (e.g., psychology, sociology and medicine) have shown interest in whether religion influences on mental health (Batson, Schoenrade & Ventis, 1993; laurensele; Abeell& Schwartz, 2002; Mazidi, & Ostovar (2006). Francis &Robbins (2000) have demonstrated a significant positive association between scores on the Oxford Happiness Inventory and scores on Francis scale of Attitude toward Christianity. Some researchers revealed that intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientations predicted higher and lower levels of well-being and happiness, respectively (Francis & wilcox, 2000; Dezutter, Socnes & Husebaut 2006; Maltby & Day 2000, 2003). In sum, studies are consistent in reporting a significant negative relationship between the intrinsic orientation toward religion and depressive symptoms and trait anxiety and a significant positive relationship between extrinsic orientation toward religion, and depressive symptoms and trait anxiety (Dezutter, Socnes & Husebaut 2006; Maltby & Day 2000, 2003).

Although the previous studies have mainly confirmed the positive relationships of personality traits and religious orientation with happiness, they did not clearly mention the mechanism of these relationships. Therefore, the main goal of the present study is to explore the effects of personality dimensions on happiness with religious orientation as a mediation variable.

1.1 Based on our research purpose, three research hypotheses are generated:

1- There is a relationship between Personality dimensions and happiness.
2- There is a relationship between Personality dimensions and religious orientation.
3- Religious orientation has a mediation role between personality dimensions and happiness.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The participants consisted of 301 Shiraz university students (110 males and 191 females) with age ranging from 18 to 24 years. The mean age was 19/93 (SD=1/36).

2.2. Instruments:

Three questionnaires were administered to collect the data:

Personality

Participants completed the authorized Dutch/Flemish version of the NEO-FFI. The NEO_FFI is a 60-item self-report scale with five subscales named as: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Openness to Experience (Hoekstra, Ormel & Fruyt,1996). Each subscale contains 12 five-point Likert-type items with a proper reliability (Cronbach alpha) rating from .67 to .87 for all subscales (Duriez & Soenens 2006). For this study the values of (Cronbach alpha) obtained were from .76 to .88. The result of factor analysis showed five general factors which explained 38.51 percent of the variance. The factor loading obtained from .42 to .73 for items.


The IEROS included two dimensions intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientation. This scale were developed by Allport & Ross(1967). Based on its original construction, nine items are related to Intrinsic (INT) and 11 items represent the extrinsic (EXT) scale. Validity and reliability in this scale were acceptable by Taylor & Mac Donald, 1999). Values of Cronbach alpha for this study were .76 for extrinsic and .84 for intrinsic scale.

Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI, Argyle, 1989)
The OHI is a 29 self-rating Likert-type items, which measures the level of happiness. Validity and reliability in Oxford Happiness Inventory were acceptable (Cheng & Furnham, 2003). Reliability value obtained in this study ($\alpha=.76$) confirmed the initial reliability of the measure.

3. Results

Results of Pearson’s correlation coefficient among the research variables, as presented in table 1, revealed that Extraversion was positively related to happiness ($r = .33, p < .001$) and Neuroticism was negatively related to it ($r = -.39, p < .001$). Neuroticism, as shown in table 1, was negatively related to Intrinsic religious orientation ($r = -.45, p < .001$) and Conscientiousness and Agreeableness were negatively related to Extrinsic religious orientation ($r = -.19$ and $r = -.17 p < .01$). Finally results showed that Intrinsic religious orientation was positively related to Happiness ($r = .32 p < .001$).

| Table 1 | Means, standard deviations, and Correlations among the Research variables |
|---------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|         | mean            | SD              | 1               | 2               | 3               | 4               | 5               | 6               | 7               |
| happiness | 77.82           | 11.5            | 1               |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| extravert | 32.69           | 6.8             | 0.33            | 1               |                 |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| neuroticism | 27.06       | 6.4             | -0.39           | 0.24            | 1               |                 |                 |                 |                 |
| openness  | 35.26           | 5.6             | 0.20            | 0.44            | -0.09           | 1               |                 |                 |                 |
| conscientiousness | 22.01 | 3.7             | 0.09            | -0.1            | -0.33           | -0.04           | 1               |                 |                 |
| agreeableness | 36.8          | 5.2             | 0.29            | 0.56            | -0.33           | 0.26            | 0.25            | 1               |                 |
| intrinsic | 29.2            | 5.5             | 0.32            | 0.04            | -0.45           | 0.12            | 0.24            | 0.11            | 1               |
| extrinsic | 14.9            | 4.01            | -0.08           | -0.12           | 0.17            | -0.01           | -0.19           | -0.17           | -0.28           |

3.1. Predicting happiness from personality traits and religious orientation

A simultaneous hierarchical regression, based on Baron and Kenny’s steps (1986), was applied to test the research hypotheses. Their steps required the followings:

1-Enter regression of happiness on Personality dimensions
2-Enter regression of religious orientation on Personality dimensions
3-Enter regression of happiness on religious orientation and Personality dimensions
4-compare steps 1 and 3

3.2. Relations between the big five personality traits and happiness

Step1:

The result of initial regression was significant ($F=16.48; P<0.001; R^2=.22$). The Extraversion ($\beta=.18, t=2.6, p<0.001$), and Neuroticism ($\beta= -.33, t=-5.7, p<0.001$) significantly predicted the Happiness.

4.3. Relations between the Big Five personality traits and religious orientation
**Step 2:**

The results of regressions were significant both for Intrinsic ($F=18.3; P<0.001; R^2=.24$) and Extrinsic religious orientation ($F=8.86; P<0.001; R^2=13$). Results showed that Conscientiousness ($\beta=-.18, t=-3.7, p<0.001$) was a negative significant predictor of Extrinsic religious orientation. Also, Results of Enter regression procedure indicated that Neuroticism ($\beta=-.44, t=-7.79, p<0.001$), Openness ($\beta=.14, t=2.42, p<0.001$) and Conscientiousness ($\beta=.11, t=2.01, p<0.001$) significantly predicted the Intrinsic religious orientation as a dependent variable.

![Diagram of regression paths](image1)

**4.4. Predicting happiness from personality traits and religious orientation**

**Step 3:**

Applying the third step of the simultaneous hierarchical regression, all variables were entered together to predict the Happiness. The purpose of this step was to identify the role of religious orientation as a mediator variable. The results of regression was significant ($F=14.1; P<0.001; R^2=.27$). The result showed that Extraversion ($\beta=0.21, t=2.97, p<0.001$), Neuroticism ($\beta=-0.24, t=-3.7, p<0.001$) and Intrinsic religious orientation ($\beta=0.212, t=3.6, p<0.001$) significantly predicted the Happiness.

![Diagram of regression paths](image2)
Step 4:
Comparing the results of steps 1 and 3 indicates that religious orientation plays a significant mediator role between personality traits and happiness. GFI=0.96, AGFI=0.92, RFI=0.95 and RMSEA=0.05 showed desirable fitness of the model. The total model, after eliminating no significant relationships, is shown in Figure 4.

![Figure 4. Total model](image)

4. Discussion
The main goal of this study was to investigate the relationship between the five-factor model of personality and happiness with mediator role of religious orientation. Results of this study, initially, supported our first hypotheses. Consistent with previous studies in the field, Neuroticism was negatively related to happiness and Extraversion was positively related to happiness. Similar results were obtained by Eysenck, 1990; Argyle, 1990; Furnham and Cheng, 2000; Cheng, and Furnham, 2003; Mazidi & Ostovar, 2006; khanzade, Moltafet and Sadati, 2007).

In order to examine the relationship between personality traits and religious orientations, two separate regressions were performed; one for intrinsic and another for extrinsic religious orientations. Results of the regression procedure revealed that conscientiousness, and openness were positively, and Neuroticism was negatively related to intrinsic religious orientation. However, conscientiousness predicted extrinsic religious orientation negatively. Pervious researchers such as Francies (1992), Lewis & Maltby (1995), Maltby (1999) and Gorm (2004) supported our results and showed that psychoticism and Neuroticism were negatively related to intrinsic religious orientations. Therefore, our findings that Conscientiousness and openness were positively related to intrinsic religious orientation are unique.

Since the main goal of this study was to explore the relationship between personality traits and happiness, with religious orientation as a mediator variable, we performed regression procedures to predict happiness using all research variables. The results of regression showed that religious orientation plays a mediation role between personality traits dimensions and happiness nicely. Previous researchers such as Francis & wilcox(2000); maltby & Day (2003) and mazidi & Ostovar (2006) supported our results and showed that religious orientation was related to well-being and happiness.

As it was mentioned earlier, we combined all research variables together and applied them to determine the relationship between personality traits and happiness with mediation role of religious orientation. Combination of the variables in this model is, by itself, the most significant characteristic of this research. Therefore, our current finding could be regarded as one of the most important contributions of this study.
The model applied in this study has an important implication for future researches, especially researches on religiosity. Our finding, that religion orientation plays a significant role on the relationship between personality traits (big five) and happiness, has more illuminated the nature of this relation. Also we realized that individuals happiness is, to some degree, affected by his/her religious orientation. Individual with an intrinsic religious orientation were happier than those with an extrinsic orientation. Therefore, it is recommended that the ground for experiencing more intrinsic religious orientation should be performed for individuals. Results of this study are limited to population in which our research sample was selected. Therefore, generalization of our findings to other groups, in Iran, or individuals in other countries is not recommended. Further studies should check this model to verify whether it is applicable to cultural settings other than the Islamic tradition or not.

References


