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Relationship between personality dimensions and hopelessness: a study on college students

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Abstract

Aim: the aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between personality dimensions and hopelessness.**Method:** in this descriptive and cross-sectional study, 120 college students from Kermanshah University were selected by convenience sampling method as research sample. NEO-FFM Questionnaire and Beck's Hopelessness Scale were used to collect data. Descriptive statistical indicators (statistics), such as frequency, mean, standard deviation and Pearson's correlation test were utilized to analyze the data.**Results:** the findings showed that there is significant relationship between hopelessness and extraversion ($r= -0/58$, $p> 0/01$), conscientiousness ($r= 0/60$, $p> 0/01$), neuroticism ($r= 0/54$, $p> 0/01$) and agreeableness ($r= -0/50$, $p> 0/01$). The relationship between hopelessness and openness was not significant.**Conclusion:** these results suggests that personality dimensions of conscientiousness, neuroticism, extraversion and agreeableness have essential roles in hopelessness of college students.

Keywords: hopelessness; personality dimensions; college students.

1. Introduction

A fundamental question in personality research is how many basic dimensions are needed to describe individual differences in personality. Over the past decades researchers have made substantial progress in answering this question by using hierarchical models that group behavioral measures into higher-order clusters. One well-known example of such a hierarchical model is the Big Five (Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1981; McCrae & Costa, 1999), consisting of Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. These basic factors can explain and predict individual differences over a wide range of settings, including mental health, job satisfaction, and work performance (e.g., Barrick
& Mount,2005; Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002). Yet, the theoretical discussion about the number of underlying basic personality dimensions remains open. Among the best-known competing hierarchical models are Cattell's (1987) 16 factors model, Eysenck's (1947, 1970) Big Three factors of Psychoticism, Extraversion, and Neuroticism (often

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referred by the acronym, PEN), and the Big Six (see, Ashton & Lee, 2007), which adds a Honesty–Humility dimension to the Big Five.

Hope is described as the process of a person's considering his/her goals together with his /her "motivation for activation" (agency) and "ways of reaching these goals" (pathways) (Snyder, 2007). Hopelessness, on the other hand, is an individual's having a negative, pessimistic vision of future and losing his motivation on future. (Abramson, Metalsky & Alloy, 1989).

Both hope and hopelessness are possible reflexions of one's own opportunities for reaching future goals. In hope there is prediction on achievement of plans for reaching the goal, while there is a sense of failure in hopelessness (Dilbaz & Seber, 1993). When an individual is faced with negative events, he thinks that these events arise from him and they will affect his whole life. In other words, he assumes that they are general and permanent. Besides, hopeful people believe that these events are temporary and they can be recovered if they struggle. Synder and colleagues (2000) also stated that the high hope level increased people's well-being and sense of self.

A considerable amount of empirical research has demonstrated a significant association between Neuroticism, a personality dimension characterized by a general tendency to experience negative affects, and depression (Bagby, Joffe, Parker, Kalemba, & Harkness, 1995; Duggan, Sham, Lee, Minne, & Murray, 1995; Enns & Cox, 1997). In fact, Neuroticism has been suggested to be a predisposing factor to clinical depression (Flett, Hewitt, Endler, & Bagby, 1995; Widiger & Trull, 1992) and it has been found to be associated with depression of non-clinical severity (Hill & Kemp-Wheeler, 1986; Saklofske, Kelly, & Janzen, 1995).

Contrary to the vast amount of studies on depression and personality, few studies have examined the relationship between hopelessness and putatively normal personality traits. For instance, Dyck (1991) found a positive and significant correlation between hopelessness and Neuroticism and a negative correlation between hopelessness and Extraversion in non-clinical and clinical samples. Similarly, hopelessness was positively predicted by Neuroticism and negatively predicted by Extraversion and Conscientiousness in a study with university students by Velting (1999a).

The accomplishment of this research is necessary, since, first, the research deals with one of the main distresses of health realm, and health psychology. Secondly, no research work has until now been conducted in our country about relationship between personality dimensions and hopelessness. Therefore, this paper reports on a study of the association between personality dimensions and hopelessness in Iranian college student.

2. Method

2.1. sample

in this descriptive and cross-sectional study, 120 college students from Kermanshah University were selected by convenience sampling method as research sample.

2.2. Data collection instruments

NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO FFI-TR):

The personality traits of the participants were measured by the short form of the NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R) developed by Costa and McCrae (1992). NEO FFI-TR which is commonly used to asses the dimensions of the normal personality is a 60 -item questionnaire. The inventory yields five factor scores: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A high score on each personality trait denotes a high level of this trait. Internal consistency of NEO FFI-TR subscales have been found to be acceptable (ranging from .55 to .83) (Eksi, 2004). On the other hand, Sunar (1996) reported that internal consistencies for the subscales ranged from .65 to .80 . In our study, Cronbach alpha reliability scores of five factors were also computed and varied between .63 and .94.

Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS):

Hopelessness Scale was developed by Beck et al. (1974). The Beck Hopelessness Scale is a 20-item self-rating instrument consisting of statements that assess future oriented negative expectations. Higher scores indicate higher

levels of hopelessness. Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was reported as .85. In the present study, Cronbach alpha coefficient was found to be .79.

2.3 Data analysis

The data was analyzed by using SPSS software. To examine the data, and to make a reply to hypotheses, different descriptive and inferential statistics methods were utilized. Initially, in order to summarize the dispersed data, descriptive methods as mean, standard deviation and Cronbach's alpha were used. Then, to study the research hypotheses (H_A) against zero hypotheses (H_O), the statistical parameter of Pearson's correlation test was used.

3. Results

Table 1: mean, standard deviation and Cronbach's alpha of variables

Variable	n	Mean	S.D	Cronbach's alpha
Openness to experience	120	31.9143	6.68252	.75
Conscientiousness	120	36.6381	3.84088	.87
Extraversion	120	37.7524	10.55236	.58
Agreeableness	120	37.0571	7.71180	.85
Neuroticism	120	33.6952	5.73136	.86
Hopelessness	120	6.0571	4.80459	.64

SD = Std. Deviation

The above table shows the mean and standard deviation for main variables of research and their components. As it is observed, the mean for personality dimensions are equal to 31 to 37 and for hopelessness is equal to 6.

As well as, the above table has shown the reliability co-efficient of Cronbach's alpha method for each and every scales and sub-scales. As it is observable, the reliability co-efficient for its all scales and sub-scales is high and at desired level, which shows the appropriate internal consistency of measuring tools. Therefore, the findings of this research can be generalized with high degree of confidence.

Table 2: correlation between personality dimensions and hopelessness

Variable	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Neuroticism
Hopelessness	-0/15	0/60	-0/58	-0/50	0/54

P value	0/10	0/000	0/000	0/000	0/000

The above table has shown the relationship of variables. As it is observable, the hopelessness in college students with Conscientiousness (r=.60, p>0.01) and Neuroticism (r=.54, p>0.01) has positive and significant relationship, and with Extraversion (r=-58, p>0.01) and Agreeableness (r=-.50, p>0.01) has negative and significant relationship.

4. Discussion

The findings of this paper have shown that hopelessness has positive and significant relationship with conscientiousness and neuroticism, while it has negative and significant relationship with extraversion and agreeableness. There was no significant relationship between openness and hopelessness. These findings indicate that personality characteristics of conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness and hopelessness have determinant role in hope, disappointment or hopelessness of college students. The extraversion and agreeableness increase the hope, versus conscientiousness and neuroticism have straight effect on hopelessness. This finding is consistency with other researchers finding like Snyder, (2007) Duggan, Sham, Lee, Minne, & Murray, (1995) and Enns & Cox, (1997). These findings are in accordance with the hypothesis that emotional instability and maladjustment play a significant role in the development and maintenance of negative affectivity. Extraversion, a personality factor which is characterized by sociability, liveliness and cheerfulness, was significantly negatively associated with hopelessness indicating that Extraversion represents an independent dimension of positive affectivity. This finding was expected since there is evidence that Extraversion represents an independent dimension of positive affectivity (Watson et al., 1988; Watson & Tellegen, 1985). The finding that hopelessness was positively predicted by Neuroticism and negatively predicted by Extraversion is in accordance with the findings by Dyck (1991) and by Velting (1999a) who reported similar results with non-clinical samples. As mentioned by Velting (1999a), hopeless individuals seem to be characterized by high levels of Neuroticism and low levels of Extraversion.

The present study contains some limitations that must be acknowledged. Firstly, it was not possible to examine gender differences due to the uneven distribution of males and females in our study. Secondly, simple size of this study is small that it limit generalization of the finding of this research. A longitudinal study would be required to determine causal relationships between the constructs under investigation.

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