

## Does Trait Predict Psychological Well-Being among Students of Professional Courses?

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With current drive of Positive Psychology, Psychological Well Being (PWB) has been an imperative concept for research and practices since last two decades. Several studies have been conducted to explore the antecedents of PWB. Present study is also a line of effort in this direction. The study was conducted to examine the role of traits (hope and Big five) in PWB among students of professional courses. The data was collected by using The Trait Hope Scale, Big Five Inventory-10 (BFI-10) and Scales of Psychological Well-Being. The results show that hope was significantly positively associated with PWB. Neuroticism was significantly negatively associated with PWB whereas agreeableness was significantly positively associated with PWB. Extraversion, Openness and Conscientiousness, have not significant association with PWB.

**Keywords:** Hope, Big Five, Psychological Well Being.

In the topical era there has been an increased interest in the study of Psychological Well Being (PWB). The field of Psychology since its beginning has devoted much more attention to human unhappiness, distress, behavioral problems and other psychological problems than the positive functioning or studying well-being or satisfaction with life otherwise known as happiness. This new movement in psychology stresses building human strengths and focuses more on positive rather than negative behavior. This positive behaviour might be determined by some enduring aspect of personality which is also known as traits.

In present scenario, the students of professional courses are passing through the difficult and diffident phase of life due to various reasons. They have to face excessive financial investment in study, hectic and highly mental demanding course related activity and lack of job in market due to recession. Considering such issues the present study was design to investigate the relationship of

traits (hope and big five personality) with PWB among students of professional courses.

### ***Psychological Wellbeing***

Psychological well-being has been defined as “engagement with existential challenges of life” (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002, p. 1007) and in this vein is arguably best represented by Ryff’s (1989) conception of the six factors of PWB. To clarify psychological well-being and its measurement, Ryff (1989) developed a theoretically derived multidimensional scale, which integrated a number of different perspectives within one measurement model.

The Ryff measure taps 6 core dimensions of psychological well-being that are common to the mental-health, clinical, and life-course developmental theories of positive psychological functioning. These 6 dimensions are: self-acceptance, or positive attitudes toward oneself; positive relations with others, including the ability to achieve close unions with others; autonomy, including

qualities of self-determination, independence, and the regulation of behavior from within; environmental mastery, which is the individual's ability to engage in, and manage, activities in one's surrounding world; purpose in life, including the beliefs that give one the feeling that there is purpose in and meaning to life; and personal growth, which represents one's continual development and striving to realize one's potential to grow and expand as a person.

### **Hope**

In Snyder et al.'s (1991) conceptualization, hope is defined as a cognitive set determined by the reciprocal interplay of two components, agency: 'goal directed determination' and pathways: 'planning of ways to meet goals' (Snyder et al., 1991). Agency represents the motivational component of hope theory, and provides the mental energy to start and maintain the use of a particular pathway through all stages of goal pursuit (Snyder, 2002). The pathways component of hope provides a measure of an individual's ability to be flexible in the face of obstacles, and their ability to see and produce alternative routes to desired goals (Snyder, 2002). In general, the two facets have been considered additive, and are often summed give an overall measure of hope.

The construct of hope is closely related to dispositional optimism, and where the latter measures beliefs about expected outcomes. Snyder et al. (1991) have proposed that agency and pathways, although being strongly correlated, remain distinct concepts. Creamer et al. (2009) investigated dispositional hope in injury survivors. They found that agency and pathways had different sized positive correlations with a variable related to childhood trauma.

### **Personality**

Personality is the unique way in which each individual thinks, acts, and feels throughout life. The Five-factor model of personality (FFM) or "big-five" has dominated

the field of personality during the last three decades, providing a significant degree of convergence in the trait factor analytic psychology (Robertson & Callinan, 1998). The five factors, usually labeled as neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

The personality traits of extraversion and neuroticism have been extensively investigated remained considerably stable over time and observable in different situations and cultures (Kline, 1993). Costa and McCrae (1980, 1994) have shown that these two personality traits can account for a significant amount of the variance of subjective well-being and that they can even predict the level of psychological well-being 20 years later.

There are a number of broad dimensions and narrower traits that have exhibited consistent correlations with subjective well being (SWB). For example, the Big Five dimensions of agreeableness and conscientiousness correlated approximately 0.20 with SWB measures. A number of narrow traits such as repressive defensiveness, trust, locus of control, desire for control, and hardiness also exhibited moderate correlations with SWB (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). It is obvious that these and other traits such as self-esteem and dispositional optimism are related to SWB (Lucas Diener, & Stria, 1996).

Previous studies have revealed that extraversion is related to psychological well-being and some of these have also been shown that extraversion has a consistent and strong correlation with psychological well-being (Headey & Wearing, 1989; Hotard, McFatter, McWhirter, & Stegall, 1989; Lu, 1995). This relation is based on the consideration that extraverts are happier because they seem to have more social skills; they are more assertive and more cooperative. Hence, it also seems that the sociability component of extraversion

accounts for this relation. In a study Lu and Shih (1997), found that extraversion retained its direct (and the strongest) effects on happiness or psychological well-being.

Despite this, and although many authors consider extraversion to be the main trait of happiness and psychological well-being (Argyle & Lu, 1990; Argyle & Martin, 1991; Diener & Larsen, 1993; Lu & Shih, 1997), the meta-analysis of DeNeve and Cooper (1998) found that, when the personality traits were grouped in the Big Five model, emotional stability (the positive pole of neuroticism) was the best predictor both of negative affect and of satisfaction with life, whereas extraversion was identified as the best predictor of positive affect. Neuroticism was also found to be negatively associated with psychological well-being (Headey & Wearing, 1989; Hotard et al., 1989; Argyle & Lu, 1990); consequently later it has been incorporated in the study of psychological well-being.

In a study on work managers, Higgs and Dulewicz (2008) reported a number of significant relationships between Big Five personality factors and measures of Well-Being (SWB and PWB). Similarly, in a study with undergraduates, Brackett and Mayer (2003) also found positive relationships between the Big Five, and Ryff's psychological well-being scale. On the basis of available review of literature the present study was designed to investigate the following objectives: (i) To examine the role of hope in psychological well being, (ii) To examine the role of personality traits (Big Five) in psychological well being, and (iii) To examine the relative importance of traits in predicting psychological well being

### Method

#### Sample:

The study was conducted on 200 students of professional courses (MBA, MCA, DNYT, B. Pharmacy, and MTA of Rajiv Gandhi South Campus (BHU), Barkachha, Mirzapur.

They were consists of 80 male and 120 female. Age of participants ranged from 21 to 28 years (M = 23.83; SD = 1.78).

#### Measures:

*Trait Hope Scale* (Snyder et al., 1991): Hope was measured using the adult Trait Hope Scale. It comprises 12 items; four agency items, four pathways items and four filler items. In completing the items, respondents are asked to imagine themselves across time and situational contexts. Participants are asked to rate how much each statement describes them on eight point Likert scale with one representing "definitely false" and eight "definitely true". Examples of agency items include "I energetically pursue my goals". Examples of pathways items include "I can think of many ways to get out of a jam". Participants used an. 8 items of agency and pathways were added to get total hope score. Internal consistency has been reported as ranging from a = .74 to .78 (Snyder et al., 1991).

*Big Five Inventory-10* (Rammstedt & John, 2007): A well-known classification about personality is the five factors known as the Big Five (neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness). Each of the dimensions included in the Big Five can be measured independently using the Big Five Inventory-10 (BFI-10). BFI-10 comprises 10 items; 2 items for each dimension. Item rated on a five point Likert scale ranging from 1-disagree strongly to 5-agree strongly. The test-retest reliabilities across six weeks was found to be .76 for neuroticism, .79 for extraversion, .65 for openness, .69 for agreeableness and .70 for conscientiousness and mean reliability for overall scale was reported .75 for the BFI-10. Convergent validity with the NEO-PI-R domains averaged .67 for the BFI-10,

*Scales of Psychological Well-being* (Ryff & Keyes, 1995): It constructed to measure the dimensions of autonomy, environmental

mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Eighteen items assess six dimensions of psychological well-being (three items per dimension). Participants responded using a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Six items are reverse scored. All the eighteen items of six dimensions were added to attain the total PWB score. Cronbach's alphas for the overall sample were  $\alpha = .73$  for autonomy,  $\alpha = .75$  for environmental mastery,  $\alpha = .78$  for personal growth,  $\alpha = .79$  for positive relations with others,  $\alpha = .69$  for purpose in life, and  $\alpha = .81$  for self-acceptance, all of which are

highly impressive given that these are three-item subscales.

**Results**

Table 1 shows the results of correlation analyses of hope, big five personality traits and PWB. Results indicates that hope was significantly positively correlated with PWB ( $r=.201, p<.01$ ). Neuroticism and Openness were found significantly negatively correlated with PWB ( $r=-.332, p<.01$ ;  $r=-.171, p<.05$ ), whereas Agreeableness was found significantly positively correlated with PWB ( $r=.314, p<.01$ ). The relationship of extraversion, and conscientiousness with psychological well-being was found positive but non-significant.

**Table 1: Correlations between psychological well-being, hope and big five personality traits (N=200)**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Psychological Well Being	1						
2. Hope	.210**	1					
3. Neuroticism	-.332**	-.171*	1				
4. Extraversion	.036	.137	-.214*	1			
5. Openness	-.171*	-.072	.205*	.093	1		
6. Agreeableness	.314**	.156	-.183**	-.022	-.076	1	
7. Conscientiousness	.047	-.015	-.224**	.098	-.130	-.021	1

\* $p<0.05$ , \*\* $p< 0.01$

To ascertain the causal relationship between predictors (trait hope and big five personality traits) and criterion (psychological well being) and relative importance of these traits in predicting psychological well-being, hierarchal regression analysis were performed.

In this analysis, hope was entered in the first step of the model; neuroticism was entered in the second step of the model whereas extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness were entered simultaneously in the third step of the model. Psychological well being was used as a criterion variable and entered in the dependent variable column. Obtained results of hierarchal regression analyses were recorded in the table 2.

Results of hierarchal regression analysis indicates that hope was significantly positively associated with PWB ( $\hat{\alpha}=.210, p<.01$ ). Neuroticism was found to be significantly negatively associated with PWB ( $\hat{\alpha}=-.305, p<.01$ ). Agreeableness was significantly positively associated with PWB ( $\hat{\alpha}=.240, p<.01$ ). Although Extraversion, openness and Conscientiousness have not significant association with PWB. Table 2 further reveals that hope accounted 4.4 % of total variance in PWB. Neuroticism accounted 9 % of total variance in PWB whereas extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness accounted only 6.6 % of total variance in PWB. It is also obvious from the table that neuroticism is the strongest predictor of PWB.

**Table 2. Summary of results of hierarchal regression analysis for hope and big five personality traits as a predictor and psychological well being as a criterion variable**

Predictors	Dependent Variable (Psychological Well-Being)		
	Step1	Step 2	Step 3
Hope	.210**	.157*	.124
Neuroticism	-.305**	-.255**	
Extraversion			-.020
Openness			-.092
Agreeableness			.240**
Conscientiousness			.013
R	.210	.366	.448
R <sup>2</sup>	.044	.134	.201
R <sup>2</sup> Change	.044	.090	.066
F <sup>a</sup> Change	9.097**	20.533**	4.007**

a Step 1 df =1, 198 Step2 df=1, 197 Step3 df=4, 193 \*p<0.05, \*\*p< 0.01

### Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to test how extensively traits (trait hope and big five personality traits) are associated with psychological well-being, and to evaluate the relative importance of these traits in predicting psychological well-being. Results indicated consistent and positive associations of hope and Agreeableness with psychological well-being whereas negative association between neuroticism and PWB. Further, there was equally consistent evidence that neuroticism ( $\hat{\alpha} = -.305$ ,  $p < .01$ ) was the strongest predictor of psychological well-being than the other traits in this research.

A positive association between hope and PWB was the first major finding of the study. Hope is a dynamic life force describe by a confident yet uncertain expectation of achieving good which, to the hoping person, is realistically possible and personally significant whereas, Psychological well-being is an engagement with existential challenges of life. Hope contributed to less depression and anxiety. So it seems logical that hope will lead PWB. Positive association of hope and psychological well-being was also supported by the previous studies. Gibson, and Parker (2003), found that hope was significantly positively related to PWB. Their study further

reveals that hope predicted 5.3% of PWB. In the same way hope predicted 4.4 % of PWB in present study. Mintan et al. (2009) have also reported that optimism positively correlated with psychological well-being. Our second major finding was a consistent and positive association between agreeableness and psychological well-being. Agreeableness reflects individual differences in concern with cooperation and social harmony. Agreeable individual values getting along with others. They are therefore considerate, friendly, generous, helpful, and willing to compromise their interests with others. Agreeable people also have an optimistic view of human nature. They believe people are basically honest, decent, and trustworthy.

Disagreeable individuals place self-interest above getting along with others. They are generally unconcerned with others' well-being, and therefore are unlikely to extend themselves for other people. Sometimes their skepticism about others' motives causes them to be suspicious, unfriendly, and uncooperative. Agreeableness is obviously advantageous for attaining and maintaining popularity. A person with good social skills is able to achieve his or her interpersonal goals and to win the praise and admiration of others. Perhaps these positive experiences instill a

sense of hope, satisfaction with life, and feeling of mastery over one's environment. Even though all people are faced with nonsocial tasks and endeavors (e.g., housing, transportation, and certain hobbies), the success at social tasks that is presumably the consequent of good social skills might cause people to generalize from their experiences and become globally hopeful, satisfied with life, and achieve high level of PWB.

The third major finding of the present study was a consistent and negative association between neuroticism and psychological well-being. The bases of neuroticism are levels of anxiety and volatility. Within these bounds, neuroticism is "a dimension of personality defined by stability and low anxiety at one end as opposed to instability and high anxiety at the other end" (Pervin, 1989).

Freud (1895) originally used the term neurosis to describe a condition marked by mental distress, emotional suffering, and an inability to cope effectively with the normal demands of life. He suggested that everyone shows some signs of neurosis, but that we differ in degree of suffering and specific symptoms of distress. Today neuroticism refers to the tendency to experience negative feelings. Neurotic individuals respond emotionally to events that would not affect most people and their reactions tend to be more intense and persist for unusually long periods of time than normal individual; due to this they often in a bad mood. These problems in emotional regulation can diminish a neurotic's ability to think clearly, make decisions, and cope effectively with stress. Neuroticism represents individual differences in adjustment and emotional stability. Individuals high on neuroticism tend to experience a number of negative emotions including anxiety, hostility, depression, self-consciousness, impulsiveness, and vulnerability to stress (Costa & McCrae,

1992). Due to presence of such negative characteristics it seems logical that neuroticism adversely affect the PWB. This result concurs with results of Furnham and Petrides (2003), who found that neuroticism, in a negative sense, was positively related to happiness.

Neuroticism emerged as the strongest predictor of PWB was the fourth important aspect of our study. The results is consistent with DeNeve and Cooper (1998) who found that, when the personality traits were grouped in the Big Five model, emotional stability (the positive pole of neuroticism) was the best predictor both of negative affect and of satisfaction with life.

A significantly positive association of Agreeableness instead of extraversion with PWB was a very interesting finding in our study. Agreeableness is referring to the quality of one's interpersonal relations. In contrast to Extraversion, which focuses primarily on the quantity and intensity of relationships, Agreeableness focuses on specific behaviors undertaken during interpersonal interactions, such as cooperating and trusting others

The problem might be arising due to disagreement on the precise definitions of the five factors. For example, Costa and McCrae (1992) suggested that warmth is a facet of Extraversion. However, both Goldberg (1992) and John (1990) have proposed warmth as a facet of Agreeableness.

The NEO-PI-R was intended to measure the Five-Factor Model rather than the lexical "Big Five" tradition (e.g., Goldberg, 1992) that underpins the development of the BFI. Thus, the NEO-PI-R differs somewhat from the BFI (Goldberg, 1992) in how the constructs are defined, especially for Openness, Agreeableness, and Extraversion (see John & Srivastava, 1999). Therefore it can be concluded that if the researchers employ the NEO-PI-R or other instrument based on Five-Factor Model extraversion trait might be

significantly positively associated with PWB whereas if they employ BFI or other measure (Goldberg, 1992) based on lexicon Big Five tradition might be find a significant positive association between agreeableness trait and PWB.

### Limitations

This study has several shortcomings. First the study conducted on only 200 students with limited age rang (20-28 years). Therefore for propose of generalization further study should be conducted on large sample with different age group and professional. Second, the use of short version of scale (BFI-10, PWB Scale) might be another imperfection of the study.

### Conclusion

In sum it can be say that, traits (especially neuroticism agreeableness and trait hope) significantly predict psychological well being among students of professional courses. Neuroticism was the strongest predictor of Psychological well being.

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