
Happiness and Personality in Young Adults with a History of Neglect

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Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Happiness, Neglect, Openness, Personality

Abstract

Aim: This study assessed the impact of neglect on happiness and personality and how different are results for the group that has experienced -childhood neglect and those who have not. **Objective:** To assess the impact of Neglect on the Happiness and Personality of Young Adults. Individuals from Urban India, with the capability of reading and understanding English, were included. A total of 82 participants between the ages 18 to 30 years were a part of the study. **Study Design:** Participants were asked to fill out the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire to sort into groups of neglect and no neglect; they also filled Oxford Happiness Questionnaire for Happiness measure and NEO-FFI for personality domains. **Results:** Kruskal-Wallis test was used to measure the significance between groups of neglect and no neglect for happiness and personality. It is found that there is no significant effect of neglect in Neuroticism ($H(1, n = 82) = [1.030], p = [.310]$), Extraversion ($H(1, n = 82) = [2.198], p = [.138]$), and Openness ($H(1, n = 82) = [0.900], p = [.343]$) dimensions of personality in adults. It is also observed that there was a statistical difference in Happiness ($H(1, n = 82) = [7.081], p = [.008]$), Conscientiousness ($H(1, n = 82) = [4.248], p = [.039]$), and Agreeableness ($H(1, n = 82) = [4.340], p = [.037]$) between groups. **Conclusion:** Neglect impacts young adult happiness. It also affects personality but only in the domains of Conscientiousness and Agreeableness.

Introduction

Neglect can be largely defined as a failure on the part of parents to provide for the child's needs, however, it can be understood in two separate subheads, i.e. Physical neglect and Psychological neglect. A range of factors affects how an individual's life will result after such experiences. All experiences and circumstances impact in both negative and positive ways on the child's resilience and vulnerability. Resilience plays a major role in how the individual copes with such experiences. A child who has suffered from neglect having few protective factors such as close relatives, friends, etc, has a higher risk of developing it into a serious and adverse outcome. There are also risk factors that contribute to having dire results and increase the risk of severe outcomes are social isolation, socio-economic disadvantage, large families, a caregiver with drug dependence, or serious mental health problems (Dubowitz & Bennett, 2007; Jaffee & Maikovich-Fong, 2011).

These actions by caregivers have a substantial risk of causing long-term harm and trauma to a child, which may follow into adult life. This may be done intentionally or unintentionally and is usually an act of omission i.e. neglect or commission i.e. abuse, or both (Bromfield, 2005; Cristofell et al., 1992; Gilbert et al., 2009). There are mainly five types of child abuse and neglect, which are, witnessing family abuse, emotional maltreatment, physical abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse. Given the fact that all individuals react differently to such experiences, some may experience the effects in a chronic and debilitating manner while others may not (Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 2007).

Physical Neglect is the inability to provide for a child's basic survival needs, such as being denied sustenance, physical health, and well-being, sensory and tactile stimulation, and social integration. Adults with a history of childhood abuse or neglect reported having more gastrointestinal symptoms (Walker et al., 1999). Also, childhood neglect predicted health indices among middle-aged adults in a longitudinal prospective study (Widom et al., 2012).

Psychological neglect is the lack of ability of the caregiver to provide for the child's psychological needs, which can be described as the caregiver not providing adequate affection, love, and concern towards the child and their feelings. This can result in its own magnitude of things for the child and the adult they will become. According to research, there is a strong connection between maltreatment and Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), this research was extensive and provides conclusive data for the same (Gilbert et al., 2009; Kearney, Wechsler, Kaur, & Lemos-Miller, 2010; Schore, 2002; Streeck-Fischer & van der Kolk, 2000). It can have an even greater impact such as suicidal ideation and attempted suicide in young individuals.

Personality can be defined as the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of an individual that makes them unique. In the given context, childhood experiences that contribute to developmental factors can essentially affect the personality of an individual growing up. Personality is shaped and influenced by many factors. The main five personality domains are: Neuroticism (personality trait characterized by sadness, moodiness, and emotional instability), Extraversion (personality trait characterized by excitability, sociability,

talkativeness, assertiveness, and high amounts of emotional expressiveness), Openness (this personality trait emphasizes imagination and insight the most out of all five personality traits), Conscientiousness (personality trait defined by high levels of thoughtfulness, good impulse control, and goal-directed behaviors), and Agreeableness (personality trait includes attributes such as trust, altruism, kindness, affection, and other prosocial behaviors).

Happiness is the state of emotional well-being brought by feelings of joy, contentment, bliss, ecstasy, and satisfaction. Both material and non-material things bring about happiness. The U-shaped happiness curve model suggests that people are fairly happier when they are young or adolescents which decline steadily from that point steadily reaching the lowest point in middle age. Several factors contribute to this such as transitioning from a more carefree life to responsibilities as an adult and the need to establish oneself as an independent individual. From there happiness substantially rises once old age begins.

Methodology

This research was conducted on 87 individuals, from which 82 individuals were selected, and their response was used for data analysis, after removing questionnaires with double responses or those who did not fit the inclusion criteria for the study. Individuals from Urban India, with the capability of reading and understanding English, were included. The participants were then asked to complete the CTQ-SF test first as it is a part of the initial screening process to divide in groups before going forward. The CTQ-SF was used as a screening tool to sort participants in groups of people who have experienced neglect and those who have not. It is a self-administered questionnaire with 28 items (with both positive and negative items) and the participant is asked to answer each question as honestly as possible. The test is rated on a 5-point Likert Scale. The scoring of test is carried out by assigning a score of ‘1 for Never True’, ‘2 for Rarely True’, ‘3 for Sometimes True’, ‘4 for Often True’ and ‘5 for Very Often True’ for positive items, and a score of ‘1 for Very Often True’, ‘2 for Often True’, ‘3 for Sometimes True’, ‘4 for Rarely True’ and ‘5 for Never True’. The CTQ-SF had good internal consistency in a non-clinical sample (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$) and an MDD sample (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$). Good test-retest reliability (ICC = 0.72) and adequate validity.

The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) was used to determine the levels of happiness in an individual. It is a 29-item questionnaire that was developed as a compact scale for the measurement of psychological well-being and a broad measure of personal happiness. While its psychometric properties are acknowledged to be acceptable, it presents scores on an ordinal scale and may thus not discriminate precisely between individual happiness levels. Each item is scored on a 6-point Likert Scale ranging from a score of 1=strongly disagree; 2=moderately disagree; 3=slightly disagree; 4=slightly agree; 5=moderately agree; and 6=strongly agree for positive statements and 6=strongly disagree; 5=moderately disagree; 4=slightly disagree; 3=slightly agree; 2=moderately agree; and 1=strongly agree for negative items. The total scores range from 1 to 6; where 1 is the lowest

level of happiness i.e. Not Happy and 6 is the highest level of happiness i.e. Too Happy. The scale demonstrates good internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .92$) and good construct validity in terms of positive association with extraversion ($r = .38$ $p < .001$) and negative association with neuroticism ($r = -.57$ $p < .001$).

For assessing Personality in five domains of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness; NEO- Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) a 60-item questionnaire is used. It is a pen-paper test that takes 10-15 minutes. Each item is measured as 0= strongly disagree; 1=disagree; 2=neutral; 3=agree and 4=strongly agree for positive statements and 4= strongly disagree; 3=disagree; 2=neutral; 1=agree and 0=strongly agree for negative statements. The scores are then totaled for the five dimensions separately i.e, neuroticism, extraversion, openness, conscientiousness, and agreeableness. The total scores of each category can be 48 indicating high scores. It is scored differently for males and females. NEO-FFI has acceptable alpha reliability values ranging from 0.63 to 0.88.

The data collected via google form were automatically exported to an excel spreadsheet in a de-identified manner. in addition, the data that was collected in offline mode were recorded and added to the spreadsheet. The data in the spreadsheet was then imported to SPSS software (IBM, Version 25) for data analysis. Descriptive statistics and Kruskal-Wallis test were primarily used to analyze the data.

Result

Table 1

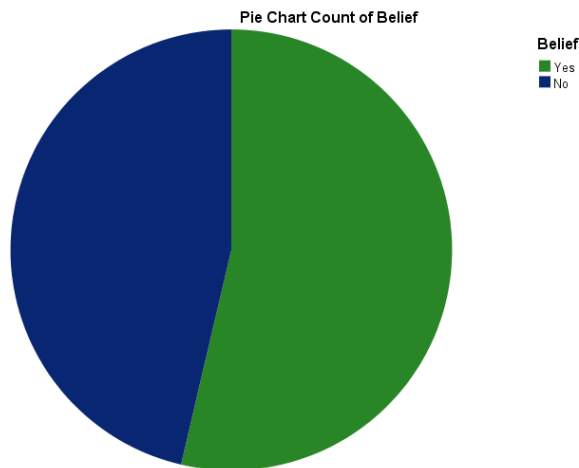
A statistical summary of the Demographic details of the participants

Demographic Details		Frequency	Valid Percent
Gender	Female	41	50
	Male	41	50
	Mean	1.50	
	Std. deviation	.503	
Age	18-20	11	13.4
	21-24	42	51.2
	25-30	29	35.4
	Mean	2.2195	
	Std. deviation	.66712	
Employment type	Full time	40	48.8
	Student	41	50.0
	None	1	1.2
	Mean	1.5244	
	Std. deviation	.52647	
Family type	Nuclear	71	87.8
	Joint	8	9.8

None	2	2.4
Mean	1.1463	
Std. deviation	.41935	

Figure 1

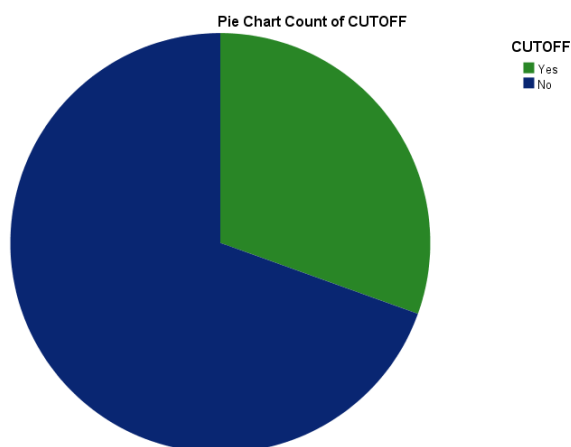
Pie chart representing the personal belief of individuals of whether they have experienced neglect as a child



Through the help of Figure 1, we can understand that 53.7% of people believed that they have experienced neglect and 46.3% of people believed that they have not experienced neglect.

Figure 2

Pie chart representing the actual percent of participants with and without experience of Neglect.



Through the help of Figure 2, we can understand that 30.5% people actually went through neglect and 69.5 % people did not.

Table 2

Kruskal-Wallis test for Neglect and Happiness

	Happiness (OHQ)
Kruskal-Wallis H	7.081
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	0.008

Table 2 represents the correlation between the two groups for Happiness using the Kruskal-Wallis test. A Kruskal-Wallis test was performed on the scores for happiness between groups of neglect. The differences between the rank totals of 31.46 (A), and 45.90 (B) were significant, $H(1, n = 82) = 7.081, p = .008$.

Table 3

Kruskal-Wallis test for Neglect and Neuroticism

	Neuroticism (NEO-FFI)
Kruskal-Wallis H	1.030
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	0.310

Table 3 represents the correlation between the two groups for Neuroticism using the Kruskal-Wallis test. A Kruskal-Wallis test was performed on the scores for Neuroticism between groups of neglect. The differences between the rank totals of 45.28 (A), and 39.84 (B) were not significant, $H(1, n = 82) = 1.030, p = .310$.

Table 4

Kruskal-Wallis test for Neglect and Extraversion

	Extraversion (NEO-FFI)
Kruskal-Wallis H	2.198
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	0.138

Table 4 represents the correlation between the two groups for Extraversion using the Kruskal-Wallis test. A Kruskal-Wallis test was performed on the scores for Extraversion between groups of neglect. The differences between the rank totals of 35.78 (A), and 44.01 (B) were not significant, $H(1, n = 82) = 2.198, p = .138$.

Table 5

Kruskal-Wallis test for Neglect and Extraversion

	Openness (NEO-FFI)
Kruskal-Wallis H	0.900
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	0.343

Table 5 represents the correlation between the two groups for Openness using the Kruskal-Wallis test. A Kruskal-Wallis test was performed on the scores for Openness between groups of neglect. The differences between the rank totals of 37.88 (A), and 43.09 (B) were not significant, $H(1, n = 82) = 0.900, p = .343$.

Table 6

Kruskal-Wallis test for Neglect and Conscientiousness

	Conscientiousness (NEO-FFI)
Kruskal-Wallis H	4.248
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	0.039

Table 6 represents the correlation between the two groups for Conscientiousness using the Kruskal-Wallis test. A Kruskal-Wallis test was performed on the scores for Conscientiousness between groups of neglect. The differences between the rank totals of 33.64 (A), and 44.95 (B) were significant, $H(1, n = 82) = 4.248, p = .039$.

Table 7

Kruskal-Wallis test for Neglect and Agreeableness

	Agreeableness (NEO-FFI)
Kruskal-Wallis H	4.340
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	0.037

Table 7 represents the correlation between the two groups for Agreeableness using the Kruskal-Wallis test. A Kruskal-Wallis test was performed on the scores for Agreeableness between groups of neglect. The differences between the rank totals of 33.60 (A), and 44.96 (B) were significant, $H(1, n = 82) = 4.340, p = .037$.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics for Neglect per Personality Domains and Happiness of Neglect Group

Group	n	Mean	SD
Happiness	25	2.84	1.106
Neuroticism	25	4.20	0.764
Extraversion	25	2.28	1.400
Openness	25	3.24	1.091
Agreeableness	25	1.80	0.957
Openness	25	1.84	0.987

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics for Neglect per Personality Domains and Happiness of No Neglect Group

Group	n	Mean	SD
Happiness	57	3.59	1.193
Neuroticism	57	3.86	1.156
Extraversion	57	2.70	1.224

Openness	57	3.53	1.020
Agreeableness	57	2.28	1.065
Openness	57	2.39	1.130

Discussion

The aim of this research was to find out the relationship between neglect and its impact on happiness and neglect in a young-adult population. The results pertaining to hypotheses are discussed and are explored in relation to supporting or refuting the proposed hypotheses. Theoretical support is provided for the hypotheses that were supported and possible explanations are provided for hypotheses that were refuted. In addition, the limitations, and further implications for potential future studies are also discussed.

According to Table 2 of the Kruskal-Wallis test, the null hypothesis was rejected as there is a significant difference between the two groups for levels of happiness. The findings of the research indicate that there is an effect of Childhood Neglect on the Happiness of Young Adults, in later life. Childhood trauma, which also includes Neglect, impacts the victims of it in a manner where they exhibit low self-esteem, and experience depression and anxiety; they are prone to denying their trauma history, create a false image, and often engage in alcohol and drug misuse (Downey & Crummy, 2021). This indicates that Neglect is also a factor that produces a poor quality of life. Another observation was that the male population was leaning more towards the lower score interpretation than females. Women had a higher number of participants in the happy category. This indicates higher internal resilience in women.

According to Table 3 of the Kruskal-Wallis, the null hypothesis was accepted as there is no significant difference between the two groups for levels of neuroticism. This indicates that growing up, the chances of having developed neurotic inclinations in personality are possible with or without adverse childhood experiences like neglect. The scores for neuroticism were higher in the 21-24 age range. However, this trend of high scores in neuroticism indicates inclination towards it regardless of having experienced neglect. Higher levels of Neuroticism is generally associated with severe childhood trauma, lack of protective factors and adverse experiences. Neglect being a small part of childhood trauma, may not affect neuroticism as significantly. There is prevalent research which indicates that childhood trauma is a determinant of neuroticism (Roy, 2002), it was also seen that significant association, does in fact, exist in neuroticism, psychoticism, emotional neglect, and lie with neuroticism (Wen et al., 2022). These researches are not in line with the findings provided by this study. A recent study on ‘Differential personality change earlier and later in the coronavirus pandemic in a longitudinal sample of adults in the United States’ (Sutin et al., 2022) indicated that there was no significant effect of pandemic on personality in adults, however, in young-adults it was observed that there was an increase in neuroticism, suggesting disrupted maturity.

According to Table 4 of the Kruskal-Wallis test, the null hypothesis was accepted as there is no significant difference between the two groups for levels of extraversion. This indicates that growing up, the chances of having developed extraversion inclinations in personality are

possible with or without adverse childhood experiences like neglect. Scores for extraversion increased in direct relation with the age range, where the highest levels of extraversion were found in the age range of 25-30 year olds. It is seen that childhood neglect with lower extraversion levels affects individuals in a manner where they experience less positive experiences (Pos et al., 2016), which validates the prior results of having a significant difference in the scores for happiness. However, this also indicates that extraversion is not greatly impacted by having childhood neglect as an experience according to the results explored in this research. The study mentioned above (Sutin et al., 2022) also refers to extraversion, providing no significant effect of the pandemic on extraversion on young adults.

According to Table 5 of the Kruskal-Wallis test, the null hypothesis was accepted as there is no significant difference between the two groups for levels of openness. This indicates that growing up, the chances of having developed openness inclinations in personality are possible with or without adverse childhood experiences like neglect. The scores were found to be higher in the middle range age group i.e., 21-24 year. It was also observed that women had higher scores than men for openness i.e. women are relatively more open to new experiences, are more creative, have a growth mindset, and are more tolerant.

According to Table 6 of the Kruskal-Wallis test, the null hypothesis was rejected as there is a significant difference between the two groups for levels of conscientiousness. This indicates that adverse childhood experiences can affect the level of conscientiousness in young adults. The scores for conscientiousness were found to be lower in the group with an experience with neglect in comparison to the group that did not face neglect. There were no significant differences found between genders either. Low levels of conscientiousness is linked to parental neglect for age 30 personality traits (Fletcher & Schurer, 2017). This is in line with the current findings of this research where a significant difference was found for conscientiousness. Also, this indicates that this is true for the age range of 18-30 and affects all young adults. Conscientiousness is the tendency to be dependable, to show self-discipline, and be organized. Childhood neglect being the most common type of maltreatment, results in developmental impairments, often resulting in self-blame, internalizing, and emotion dysregulation, this was a prominent result seen in adolescents (Tanzer et al., 2020). This indicates that conscientiousness has, in fact, a positive relationship with neglect.

According to Table 7 of the Kruskal-Wallis test, the null hypothesis was rejected as there is a significant difference between the two groups for levels of agreeableness. This indicates that adverse childhood experiences can affect the level of agreeableness in young adults. Agreeableness is a measure of an individual's ability to maintain prosocial behavior i.e. higher levels of agreeableness indicate that an individual is altruistic, straightforward, and cooperative. The scores for agreeableness were higher in the group which had not experienced neglect, and most scores of the neglect group were clustered towards "low" or "very low" categories. There were no significant gender differences found for it. Agreeableness is a protective factor for adults against negative experiences; given their history of childhood maltreatment. Emotional maltreatment leads to profound problems in psychiatric domains in comparison to physical or sexual abuse (Brents et al., 2018) and it is highly associated with depression and anxiety in adulthood (Hovens et al., 2010). The current

findings of the research are in line with the existing research that relates to childhood maltreatment which also includes neglect. This indicates that neglect, as an individual factor, is also positively related to agreeableness.

Conclusion

The summary of the study and the conclusions drawn from the results of the study are the study observed the relationship of neglect with happiness and personality dimensions in young adult groups and examined the differences between neglect and no-neglect groups. It was observed that neglect does, in fact, affect adulthood as concluded by various tests. It was observed that neglect affects happiness in young adults due to factors observed in personality dimensions. It was noted that neuroticism, openness, and extraversion remain unaffected by childhood neglect experiences indicating the influence of external factors which remain unknown. A general trend of high neuroticism in the 21-24 age range. Positive correlation was observed between neglect and personality factors of agreeableness and conscientiousness. Indicating that they follow the general researched implications of low agreeableness and conscientiousness resulting in the inability to have positive experiences and hence having lower levels of happiness.

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