

The Role of Personality in the COVID 19 Fear of Young Female Adults

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ABSTRACT

The Pandemic of COVID 19 has been feared the most without a doubt and the research question- Is there a relationship between Fear of COVID 19 and personality? needs to be addressed. The current study aims to understand the relationship between personality factors and COVID-19 fear. Two hundred and two young female adults (Mean= 20.6238, SD= 1.99178) living in NCR (Noida) region, who recovered from COVID 19 were taken for this study. Results revealed that out of the five personality factors, emotional stability had a significant negative relationship with fear of COVID 19. The study concludes that increased emotional stability as an essential personality trait can reduce COVID fear to aid mental health.

Keywords: *Pandemic, COVID 19, Fear of COVID 19, Personality, Young females, Emotional stability*

The pandemic of COVID-19 was first observed in December 2019, as a cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan, China (Lee, S. A., et al. 2020). Some of the cases have been reported from visiting or working in the Wuhan seafood and animal market in Wuhan (Lu, H., et al., 2020). This disease was caused by a newly discovered coronavirus which was named COVID-19, which started to spread initially within China and then to the rest of the world. Since its first recognizable proof by the Wuhan municipal health Commission, China, COVID-19 has been declared as a pandemic (WHO, 2020). The incredibly high contamination rate and high mortality rate let the public authorities recommend numerous nations to practice social distancing and self-isolation to decrease transmission rates, the danger of extreme illness, and the effect on the health services (Qian, M., et al., 2020). Since the pandemic being declared, many countries imposed curfews or lockdowns and applied measures to improve social distancing to control the coronavirus pandemic (Alrabadi, N., et al., 2021, Mukhtar, S., 2021, Dechsupa, S., et al., 2020).

The impact of COVID-19 on personality profiles can be understood by various research done around the world. Research conducted in China reported that stress, depression, and anxiety were the immediate psychological reaction of the individuals during the initial phase

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of the COVID-19 pandemic (Wang, C., et al., 2020). Also, after the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic, higher negative emotions (depression, anxiety, and stress) and lower positive emotions (happiness) were noted (Li, S., et al., 2020). The theory of the 'Big Five' given by Costa and Mc Crae, explains the five dimensions (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness) that depicts a logical and firm set of characteristics that impacts the thoughts, behaviors, and practices of an individual's different life experiences (Costa, P.T., Jr., et al., 1990). In France, it was reported that individuals with a higher level of neuroticism were at higher risk to develop PTSD in potential crises (like a pandemic or natural calamity, etc.) (Puechlong C et al. 2020). It was found that after the 2004 tsunami, individuals with a lower level of emotional stability experienced a greater impact of the stressful situation and were more likely to develop post-traumatic stress symptoms (Hussain, A., et al., 2013). There is also evidence that suggests the existence of corona phobia as a major psychological indicator of distress during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lee, S. A., et al., 2020). A study conducted on health care professionals indicated that corona phobia persisted among the frontline workers and health care professionals which caused various psychological distress and symptoms on their mental health (Amin, S., 2020). Research also suggests that individuals with a higher level of neuroticism, and corona phobia had a significantly higher level of anxiety and, individuals with a higher level of neuroticism, Corona phobia, and hypochondriasis had a significantly higher level of depression (Lee, S. A., 2020).

Fear of COVID-19

It is defined as the emergence of fear, anxiety, and stress due to the rise of covid-19 (Ahorsu, D. K., et al., 2020). A study was conducted among health care professionals (nurses) to determine their level of fear of COVID-19 and their job satisfaction. Results revealed that since the outbreak of novel coronavirus, there is an increased fear of COVID-19 which is associated to lower job satisfaction and an increase in psychological distress (Labrague, L. J., & Santos, de, L. 2021). Another research conducted among Pakistani doctors studied the association between fear of COVID-19 and workplace anxiety and avoidance during the pandemic. Results revealed that the fear of COVID-19 negatively affected workplace performance and, there was an increase in workplace avoidance among the doctors (Malik, S., et al., 2021).

Personality

It is defined as a characteristics configuration of behavior and response patterns evolved by each person reflecting their adjustment to life (VandenBos, G. R. 2007). A research was conducted to find out the association between personality profiles and COVID-19 related concerns and impacts. Results found that Higher neuroticism scores were related to COVID-19 associated concerns, stress, worries, distress, and habits. On the other hand, a higher score of conscientiousness extraversion, openness, and agreeableness were related with COVID-19 safety measures and moreover lower association with COVID-19 related worries, stress, and anxiety (Al-Omiri, M., K., et al., 2021).

Good studies on personality and COVID-19 fear are a few. One study reported that the participants with highly adaptive personalities showcased lower COVID-19 fear and lower level of stress. They had a better quality of sleep and were more active than the other personality profiles (Ahmed, O., et al., 2021). Hence the research question- Is there a relationship between Fear of COVID 19 and personality? needs to be addressed.

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The Current Study

A research investigated the role of personality in thoughts, behavior, and feeling among students during the initial phase of the pandemic. The results reported that individuals with more agreeableness tend to follow the government-applied restrictions and rules regarding the pandemic more sincerely, whereas the individuals with less emotional stability were the ones hoarding more food supplies, panicked more often, felt insecure, and worried about their financial instability and loss. (Asselmann, E., et al., 2020). Following various research evidence and directions, the current study aims to understand whether an individual's personality is susceptible to COVID-19 fear and understand their relationship.

- Hypothesis 1: there will be a significant association between fear of covid 19 and extraversion.
- Hypothesis 2: there will be significant association between fear of covid 19 and agreeableness.
- Hypothesis 3: there will be significant association between fear of covid 19 and conscientiousness.
- Hypothesis 4: there will be a significant association between fear of covid 19 and emotional stability.
- Hypothesis 5: there will be a significant association between fear of covid 19 and openness to experience.
- Hypothesis 6: Emotional stability will be a significant predictor of fear of covid 19.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample of two hundred and two young female adults (N=202); aged between 18 to 27 years (Mean age= 20.6238, SD= 1.99178) from the NCR region (Noida) were taken for this study. Participants with the education level of Undergraduate, Graduate, and Postgraduate were only considered for this study. Most importantly, the participants who recovered from COVID-19 were only considered for this study.

Instruments

Three measures were used in this study,

Fear of COVID-19 Scale: Developed by Ahorsu, D. K., Lin, C. Y., Imani, V., Saffari, M., Griffiths, M. D., & Pakpour, A. H. (2020), to measure the impact of fear of COVID-19 of an individual. The tool consists of 7 items, the response scale from this tool ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree), Psychometric properties like reliability and validity.

Personality Scale: Developed by Gosling, S. D., Rentfrow, P. J., & Swann, W. B., (2003), to assess the big five personality dimension of an individual. The tool consists of 10 items, the response scale from this tool ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree), Psychometric properties like reliability and validity.

Data Analysis

SPSS statistics was used for the computation of descriptives, Pearson's correlation coefficients and simple linear regression. The personality factor which was having significant association with COVID 19 fear was considered for regression.

RESULTS

Table 1 Coefficient of correlation between personality and fear of COVID-19

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Extraversion		-.051	.061	.107	.267**	-.110
2 Agreeableness	-.051		.269**	.213**	.035	.059
3 Conscientiousness	.061	.269**		.327**	.166*	.009
4 Emotional Stability	.107	.213**	.327**		-.008	-.175*
5 Oppenness to Experience	.267**	.035	.166*	-.008		-.074
6 Fear of COVID-19	-.110	.059	.009	-.175*	-.074	

Table one represents coefficient of correlation between personality and fear of COVID-19. The coefficient of correlation between fear of COVID-19 and emotional stability was significant negative ($r = -.175, p < 0.05$). The coefficient of correlation between fear of COVID-19 and extraversion was negative but not significant ($r = -.110, p > 0.05$). The coefficient of correlation between fear of COVID-19 and agreeableness was positive but not significant ($r = .059, p > 0.05$). The coefficient of correlation between fear of COVID-19 and conscientiousness was positive but not significant ($r = .009, p > 0.05$). The coefficient of correlation between fear of COVID-19 and oppenness to experience was negative but not significant ($r = -.074, p > 0.05$).

Table 2 Linear regression with emotional stability as a predictor of fear of COVID-19

(DV) Criterion: Fear of COVID-19

(IV) Predictor	B	β	R ²	Adjusted R ²	t	Sig.
Emotional stability	-.374	-.175	.031	0.026	-2.515	.013

Table two represents the simple linear regression with emotional stability as a predictor of fear of COVID-19. Emotional stability as a predictor had about 3.1% negative impact of fear of COVID-19 ($R^2 = .031$).

DISCUSSION

The current study explains the impact of personality factors and fear of COVID-19 among young female adults living in India. Findings revealed that extraversion and agreeableness were not significantly associated with fear of COVID-19. Hence, our first hypothesis ‘there will be a significant association between fear of covid 19 and extraversion’ and the second hypothesis ‘there will be a significant association between fear of covid 19 and agreeableness’ were both rejected. Results further revealed that conscientiousness and openness to experience were also not significantly associated with fear of COVID-19. Hence our third hypothesis ‘there will be a significant association between fear of covid 19 and conscientiousness’ and the fifth hypothesis ‘there will be a significant association between fear of covid 19 and oppenness to experience’ were both rejected as well.

Emotional stability was however significantly (negative) associated with the fear of COVID-19. Hence our fourth hypothesis ‘there will be a significant association between fear of covid 19 and emotional stability’ was accepted. This explains a considerable negative correlation between emotional stability and fear of COVID-19, suggesting that emotional stability decreases among young female adults as the level of fear of COVID-19 rises. Existing literature also suggests that individuals who are aware of the possible dangers of coronavirus are more likely to experience higher emotional distress and emotional instability as well as significant behavioral changes during the pandemic (Inna, A., et al., 2020).

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Finally, emotional stability was a significant predictor of fear of covid 19 which confirms our sixth hypothesis 'Emotional stability will be a significant predictor of fear of covid 19'. A study was conducted on students from Germany which suggested that students who are less emotionally stable tend to hoard up essentials, fear financial loss, and feared public space due to the crisis (Asselmann, E., et al., 2020). In the current study, emotional stability as a predictor had a 3.1% negative impact on the fear of COVID-19. The dimension of emotional stability in the current study is referred to as a sense of apprehension or malaise related to fear of COVID-19 during the pandemic.

The study suggests a strong association between emotional stability and fear of COVID-19 and also explains emotional stability as a significant predictor of fear of COVID-19. The study can be useful in understanding the counselling goals and target areas for mental health service delivery. It must be noted that the personality scale and fear of COVID-19 scale used did not ascertain any diagnosis. An in-depth study with a large and more diverse sample may help in providing stronger evidence.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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