

Covid-19 Pandemic and Beyond: A Study on Happiness & Personality in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic brought the whole world to a halt. It changed the way many perceived their surroundings and drastically impacted their happiness, as well as mental health. Most people were forced to lose social contact in a way that mentally secluded them. However, a common understanding prevailed, that the lockdown was easy on the introverts and tough on the extroverts. Being at home, avoiding people, being content by living in solitude are all common traits that introverts generally can identify with, hence, believing that the lockdown was an introvert's heaven is justifiable. Similarly, it is understandable that due to the same reasons the lockdown was significantly difficult for the extroverts. Nevertheless, as much as the claim seems valid, it lacks empirical evidence. The present study therefore aims to study the impact of the lockdown on introverts and extroverts and the effect it had on their happiness, ultimately to see whose happiness was more severely affected, or if both the personalities were affected in a relatively similar manner. The study was conducted on 50 young adults. Standardized tests of personality and happiness were administered. The findings of the study revealed a significant correlation between extraversion and happiness, as well as extraversion and assertiveness, while neuroticism and extraversion shared a negative correlation. It was observed that contradictory to common belief extroverts are relatively happier even post the lockdown period in comparison to the introverts. The research also found that being open to new experiences has no correlation to happiness. The research therefore provided insightful and empirical evidence for claims previously made in hindsight, highlighting the relationship between personality and happiness.

Keywords: *Personality, Introverts, Extroverts, Lockdown, Happiness, Covid-19 pandemic, Lockdown.*

“What seems to us as bitter trials are often just blessings in disguise” – Oscar Wilde.

The Covid-19 Pandemic led to a nationwide lockdown to be imposed during March 2020. All institutions were closed and people were forced into their homes. Due to the urgency of the lockdown many people had to stay away from their families, and loved ones, with limited or no virtual contact. Fear and anxiety prevailed and the uncertainty took a severe toll on the psychological well-being of many. In these extraordinary

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circumstances it is significant to understand that different personalities employed distinguished coping mechanisms to deal with the challenges at hand.

Individuals throughout the world differ to their response to stressful situations. The pandemic abruptly changed and challenged everyone's perspective on the previously established normal. The suddenness of the lockdown further posed as an obstacle for individuals who weren't used to be confined in their homes as well as those who relied on this with their own will.

Martin (2020) in a study describes how individuals differ drastically in their response to a problem or a stressor. Some people are born with a temperament that predisposes them to higher or lower levels of tolerance to stress.

Happiness of individuals thus, was severely compromised. Hence, individuals assess happiness deeply based on their personalities. As described by Carver and Smith (2010) "The relationship between personality and happiness is vital and complex and determines a lot about the functioning of the individual."

Personality

Waller (1999) describes personality as the individual differences in characteristic patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving. Personality can therefore, be referred to as those characteristics of an individual which are relatively stable over a larger period of time.

Weinberg & Gould (1999) describe personality as the "characteristics or blend of characteristics that make a person unique." It is important to mention that an individual's personality is very unique and defining to the particular individual alone and it is unlikely that two individuals might share an entirely identical personality.

Therefore, personality has been considered to be a dynamic concept and has been worked on by many theorists. Many psychologists believed that personality has a biological basis Allport (1961) believed that "personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his characteristics behavior and thought." Hence personality and biology are relatively interdependent, and various theories explore this interdependence.

Trait theories of Personality

A trait can be thought of as a relatively stable characteristic that causes individuals to behave in certain ways. The trait approach to personality is one of the most significant theoretical areas in the study of personality. The trait theorists suggest that individual personalities are composed of a number of broad dispositions. We can therefore understand traits as the building blocks to personality. Allport (1937) defines traits as "The characteristics we employ to describe a person to somebody else can be understood as personality traits. Therefore, Personality is prominently determined at birth but is shaped by the individual's environmental experiences."

Furthermore, it was later theorized that behavior could be represented by two dimensions: Introversion / Extroversion (E); Neuroticism / Stability (N) called second-order personality traits (Eysenck 1947). He later added a third trait / dimension – **Psychoticism/Normality (Eysenck, 1966). His research gave the personality trait approach and the studying of personality a more empirical basis.**

Introversion and Extraversion

Extraverts are sociable individuals who crave excitement and change, and thus can become bored easily. They tend to be carefree, optimistic and impulsive. They are more likely to take risks and be thrill seekers. This is because they inherit an under aroused nervous system and hence seek stimulation to restore the level of optimum stimulation. **Introverts** on the other hand lie at the other end of this scale, being quiet and reserved. They are already over-aroused and shun sensation and stimulation. Introverts are reserved, plan their actions and control their emotions. They tend to be serious, reliable and pessimistic (Eysenck, 1987).

It was suggested that the principal distinction between personalities is the source and direction of an individual's expression of energy. "Extraversion" can be defined as an "outward-turning of *libido*" while "introversion" is defined as the "inward-turning of *libido*" (Jung, 1971)

What makes the study of aspects of personality important is that this allows psychologists to predict how people will respond to certain situations and the sorts of things they prefer and value.

Happiness

Lyubomirsky (2007) explains how Happiness can mean different things to different individuals; commonly happiness is understood as the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile.

When psychologists use the term happiness, they tend to mean one of two things. In the narrow sense, happiness is a specific emotion that people feel when good things happen. It includes feelings of pleasantness along with moderate levels of arousal. Simply put, people who are happy in this way tend to experience frequent positive emotions and infrequent negative emotions.

Happiness and Personality

According to a research by Pishva, Ghaleban, Moradi, Hoseini (2011) it was found that there was a positive direct relation between extraversion and happiness; and a negative direct relation between neuroticism and psychoticism with happiness. Based on these results, it was understood that personality provides the context in which happiness and operates.

In a much general sense, it is significantly and commonly believed that extroverts have a tendency to be higher on happiness. Introverts hence, lie on the other end of this extreme signifying that in comparison they are unhappy. Similarly, extroverts are more commonly opinionated and hence more assertive while the introverts are therefore more laid back.

The links between personality and happiness as well as well-being are extremely significant and it is commonly understood that one type of personalities are more commonly to develop a positive perspective and outlook in comparison to others.

A Study conducted by Newman (2010) further verifies this claim that certain personalities and certain flavors of happiness seem to go together and, though the results don't imply causation, they might inform individuals how they personally go about pursuing happiness. Therefore, the relationship between happiness and personality is vitally crucial.

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However happiness is subjective and in a sense cannot be described with a simple worded description. While the extroverts are happier with over stimulation, introverts simply experience happiness differently. They attain their share of happiness through their alone time. Hence the lockdown period with social distancing and seclusion should have been an introvert's ultimate paradise. A study by Wei (2020) found that introverts were only as adversely affected by the lockdown imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic as much as the extroverts and explored the relationship between social support and mental health.

Therefore, the claim that introversion acts as a natural shield against the psychological effects of the pandemic especially in terms of social seclusion and mental well-being are not entirely objective. However, personality does play a deeply fundamental role in the way an individual attains gratification in terms of happiness and more.

Purpose

The purpose of the study aims to understand if different personalities relatively were affected differently during the pandemic, especially focusing on how the extraverts and introverts were affected differently in terms of happiness. It also aims to evaluate the general levels of happiness amongst both the personalities. Furthermore, the relationship of extraversion is also evaluated in terms of other personality factors.

Hypotheses

Happiness will be positively correlated to Assertiveness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to experience, but negatively correlated to Neuroticism.

Post Lockdown, extroverts will be higher on happiness than introverts.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample consisted of 50 young adults (34 females, 15 males and a pansexual individual) from Chandigarh and Pune who are predominately are young adults who spent the lockdown at their homes.

Measures

The following standardized tests were employed

The Big Five Inventory (BFI) - The Big Five Inventory (BFI) is a 44 item self-report questionnaire, developed by John and Srivastava. (1999), it measures an individual on the five personality factors from the Big Five, or the five-factor model (FFM), with each item being rated on a five-point scale. The five factors analyzed using this scale are commonly arranged in the acronym, OCEAN which means openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism respectively, representing the big five traits. Respondents were asked to rate each item on a 5 point scale, depending on how strongly they agreed or disagreed to it respectively. Point 1 indicated strong disagreement while point 5 on the scale indicated a strong agreement.

Oxford Happiness Questionnaire- The 29-item Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) is a widely-used scale for assessment of personal happiness. The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire was developed by psychologists Argyle and Hills (2002) at Oxford University. It is used to empirically measure happiness and wellbeing. It is a 6 point scale, the extremes of which range from 'strongly disagree' at point 1 to 'strongly agree' at point 6. The respondent was asked to choose the point that most accurately describes his/her self assessment for the specific given item.

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were administered and collected through Google Forms. The participants were assured of the confidentiality of the information to elicit their honest responses without any fear of inhibitions. Standardized psychological tests were administered to participants.

RESULTS

Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlations were worked out to find the relation between all variables

Table 1: Showing Mean and Standard Deviation between all variables, N=50

| | Extraversion | Assertiveness | Conscientiousness | Neuroticism | Openness to experience | Happiness |
|---------------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------|------------------------|-----------|
| N | 50 | 50 | 50 | 50 | 50 | 50 |
| Standard deviation | 4.99 | 5.52 | 5.77 | 6.11 | 4.34 | 0.829 |

Table 2: Showing Correlations

| | Extraversion | Assertiveness | Conscientiousness | Neuroticism | Openness to experience | Happiness |
|-------------------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------|------------------------|-----------|
| Extraversion | — | | | | | |
| Assertiveness | 0.361** | — | | | | |
| Conscientiousness | 0.221 | 0.307* | — | | | |
| Neuroticism | -0.314* | -0.288* | -0.387** | — | | |
| Openness to experience | 0.017 | 0.120 | 0.262 | -0.038 | — | |
| Happiness | 0.336* | 0.396** | 0.379** | -0.592*** | 0.217 | — |

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

DISCUSSION

The results show that there is a significant positive correlation between happiness & extroversion ($r=0.336, p<.05$). Happiness and Assertiveness are also prominently positively correlated ($r=0.396, p<.01$). Happiness and conscientiousness also showed a positive correlation ($r=0.379, p<.01$) while Happiness showed a negative correlation with Neuroticism. Meanwhile no significant correlation was found between happiness and openness to experiences.

However, we also found correlation of personality variables within themselves, for instance there can be seen a significant positive correlation between Extraversion and Assertiveness ($r= 0.361, p<.01$) and a negative correlation between Extraversion and Neuroticism ($r=-0.314, p= <.05$).

Hence the hypotheses those extroverts are likely to be happier has been accepted, but the hypothetical claim that introverts were likely to be happier post the lockdown period was not empirically proven. As Wei (2020) explained in their study, that the impact of lockdown was adverse on the introverts as well, since they too lacked human support which to some extent is vital even for them. On the other hand, the hypothesis of extroverts being more assertive has been accepted as well. It has also been proved that extroverts are low on neuroticism,

hence the hypotheses for the same has also been accepted, while no correlation between openness to new experiences and happiness were found, rejecting the final hypotheses.

CONCLUSION

During the pandemic this human support and interaction was extensively limited, and yet the extroverts were relatively happier than the introverts. This can be due to other personality factors of extroverts such as being significantly high assertiveness, and majorly low on neuroticism. The study was conducted on 50 individuals, pre dominantly young adults from India. The standardized measures of personality and happiness were administered on the participants through Google forms. It can be clearly seen that there is a significant positive correlation between happiness and extraversion. A positive correlation is also found between extraversion and assertiveness, while a negative correlation is found between neuroticism and extraversion. Meanwhile no correlation was found between openness to new experiences and happiness. The study places a much-needed light on some of the common misconceptions related to personality, especially emphasizing the relationship between happiness and personality during the pandemic.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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