

Defense Styles and Personality Among Young Adults

Vimal Kumar S.V.^{1*}, Jasseer J.²

ABSTRACT

Personality designates the patterns of behavior and pre dispositions that determine how a person will think, feel and act. Defense styles consisted of apparent derivatives of defense mechanisms. Defense mechanisms are psychological strategies brought in to play by various entities to cope with reality and to maintain self-image. The present study was an attempt to find out relationship between different defense mechanisms and personality in young adults. The sample consists of a total of 120 young adults whose age's ranges from 19 to 40. The results indicated that male and female young adults significantly different on the variables personality and defense style. The study also found out that different defense styles are related with personality.

Keywords: *Defense styles, Personality*

In becoming a member of a culture, a human being is required to modulate the gratification of his desires in accordance with the constraints of his social environment. This requirement, in turn stimulates him to develop a myriad of mental skills, known collectively as the 'ego', by means of which he reconciles the gratification of his own desires with the demands which others make upon him. Hence, owing to cultural variations, peoples of different societies develop not only different ways of reducing the tensions of the motives that they share as members of the same species but also different sets of learned motives.

To allow the perceptual banishment of the motives that have become hostile to us, we develop a number of protective devices which Freud described as the mechanisms of ego defense. Because so many of these devices are established in early childhood, they limit the individual's ability sub sequentially to handle his unconscious motives in a new fashion. For if he is unaware of the existence of a motive, he can hardly be expected to experiment with alternative methods of dealing with it. Thus, the child- in the form of unconscious motive- may continue to live on in the man.

Nevertheless, under special circumstances, the individual can regain conscious awareness of his unconscious motives, and learn new ways of reducing the tensions which they engender. But to accomplish this relearning, the individual must expose himself to the very emotional-unpleasantness which first prompted the development of his ego defenses. Consequently,

¹Department of Psychology, University of Kerala, Kariavattom Campus, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

²Phd, Department of Psychology, University of Kerala, Kariavattom Campus, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

*Corresponding Author

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even individuals who voluntarily seek a psychotherapeutic means of increasing their level of self- insight regularly resist the exploration of the unconscious roots of their behavior (Freud, 1949).

Personality does not evolve from the effects of a single variable such as harmonic functioning or social status, but is formed by a multiplicity of forces. Apart from externally imposed stimulation, the organs of our body are in constant operations and in varying states of chemical imbalance. The ingredients of personality are extracted largely from the culture in which the individual is reared. Indeed, even the individuals inherent physical attributes interact with existing social values in such a way as to have a profound influence upon the development of his personality.

Objective of the study

The present study is an attempt to study about the relationships between personality and defense styles among young adults.

METHOD

The plan and procedure for the investigation is presented under different headings.

Sample

The sample consisted of 120 young adults belonging to the age group of 19 to 40 years.

Tools

For data collection, the following tools were used.

- **Eysenck Personality Questionnaire- Revised (Malayalam Adaptation):** This was designed to give a rough and ready measure of 3 important personality dimensions; Psychoticism, Extraversion and Neuroticism. A lie score was also incorporated. Each of these three traits and lie score are measured by means of 90 questions, carefully selected after lengthy item analysis and factor analysis. The test retest reliabilities are 0.78(for P), 0.89(for E), 0.86(for N) and 0.84 (for L). The subject's responses are scored for P, E, N & L using separate stencil keys for the scales. The final scores for each of the scales are derived by counting all the points assigning one point each to the encircled 'yes' or 'no' responses seen through the stencil keys. The score of each scale is the sum of these responses.
- **Defense Style Questionnaire (Malayalam Adaptation)** (Menon, M, et al, 2009): The original version of the DSQ was developed by Bond, et al (1989) with the objective of assessing conscious derivatives of defensive functioning, the intention being to elicit manifestations of subjects characteristic style of dealing with conflict, either conscious or unconscious based on the assumption that persons can accurately comment on their behavior from a distance. There are four defense styles have been named, immature, mature, image distorted and action-oriented defense styles. The validity for the original version of the scale has been well established with both content validity and concurrent validity. The validity established for the original scale may be claimed for the present adaptation also on the basis of the fact that no major changes in the context has been made in the adapted version. The reliability of the Malayalam version was estimated using two methods; viz, the Spearman Brown Split half and the co efficient of alpha. The reliability co efficient computed revealed that the questionnaire is reliable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to find out the relationship between different personality dimensions, lie score and defense styles, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used. The results obtained are listed in table 1. It can be observed that there existed positive correlation among psychoticism and immature defense styles; neuroticism and immature defense styles; and neuroticism and image distorted defense styles. It can also be noted that lie score is negatively correlated with immature defense styles.

The table shows that Pearson 'r' obtained between psychoticism and immature defense style is 0.310, which is significant at 0.01 level. This indicated that there is low positive correlation existed between these variables. Lingiardi et al (1999) studied a group of 50 outpatients and found that the border line defenses, especially splitting, correlated with the scale for depression, anxiety, paranoid ideation and psychoticism. Immature defense style consists of apparent derivatives of defenses like splitting, projection, passive aggression etc. The table indicates that there existed significant correlation between neuroticism and immature defense style. Pearson 'r' obtained between these variables was 0.497, which is significant at 0.01 level. This indicated that there was substantial or marked correlation between these two variables. Soldz, Budman, Demby and Merry (1995) studied defenses and big five traits on outpatients, who were participating in group therapy, and results showed that immature defense scales scores predicted high neuroticism. The present finding is supported by this study.

The table also indicates that Pearson 'r' obtained between neuroticism and image distorted defense style is 0.223, which is significant at 0.05 level. This shows that there is low positive correlation present between these variables. Neuroticism refers to emotional instability and image distorted defense style consists of defense mechanisms like denial, reaction formation, withdrawal, omnipotence etc. people who use these defenses use emotion focused coping strategies in handling with stressful situations. They deny or withdraw from the original situations. Individuals with neurotic tendencies are emotionally unstable, and they can be expected to show such behavioural patterns like withdrawal, or denial etc to escape from emotionally threatening situations.

The table also indicates that Pearson 'r' obtained between Lie score and immature defense style is -0.198, which is significant or negligible negative relation between these two variables. Lie scores indicate 'fake good' tendencies or social conformity. These people try hard not to show immature defenses like passive aggression, projection, regression, help rejecting complaining, isolation, undoing etc.

CONCLUSION

The present study was intended to measure personality and defense styles among young adults. From the results, it was noted that most of the personality traits were correlated with different defense styles. Defense mechanisms are very essential when considering a person's coping and dealing with stressful situations. The study highlighted the relationship between defense styles and personality, and by that we could predict the prognosis and chance of vulnerability and resiliency of the individual at a glance.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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