

The Impact of Personality Traits on Career Indecision in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the research was to understand how personality traits impact career indecision in young adults. It is often seen that young adults are actively exploring their interests and personalities to develop career aspirations and understand their personal strengths (Hartung et al., 2005). For this purpose, an online survey was conducted for students aged 18-23 years. The sample comprised of 117 students from colleges and universities from various cities in India. Online survey method was used for the purpose of data collection and analysis, of quantitative data were carried out by employing descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS (version 29.0) software. The results indicated that conscientiousness personality trait was negatively correlated with career indecision. Lastly, openness trait significantly influenced career indecision scores.

Keywords: Career Indecision, Personality, Young Adults, Career

Decision originated from the Latin word ‘decidere’ which means to determine, a decision is the act of selecting one option from a couple of alternatives. One of the most important decisions a person makes in their life is related to their career. A career is a long-lasting period of continuous learning and working experience. It has been defined as a planned process that connects different interests, and abilities and involves decision-making.

Career choices are a major developmental task in a person’s life, which can be daunting as it encompasses considering various factors. Teenagers and young adults often find themselves feeling a lot of constraints when deciding on a career path. Consequently, it is during this period of life that they have to make certain decisions that will shape their future occupational identity (Kirdok, O., & Harman, E., 2018). In the process of making vocational decisions, individuals find themselves guided by blind fate or the words of others. (Morgan, 1980).

Frydenberg (2008) states that due to changes in the market and continuous transitions, people need to make more decisions with respect to their career goals. These decisions come with various social, financial, and psychological difficulties. Moreover, in order to make the optimal career choice, individuals find themselves feeling more anxious, confused, and

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procrastinating in the decision-making process. This leads to "career indecision," which is the inability to make choices related to education or occupation. (Kelly & Lee, 2022)

Career indecision has been associated with problems pertaining to career growth and issues in making career-related decisions (Priyashantha et al., 2022). According to Patton et al. (2001), it can occur at any point in a career, but it is predominantly seen during career transitions among adolescents and students who are deciding on university majors. During their developmental years, young adults are navigating between forming new identities and dealing with confusion, which can further lead to role confusion and indecisiveness. (Erikson, 1963) Erikson (1963) claimed students are deciding the role they will occupy in the occupational world.

It is often seen that young adults are actively exploring their interests and personalities to develop career aspirations and understand their personal strengths. However, some of them find themselves unable to come to a decision that impacts their career decisions. These individuals might have some ambiguous understanding but lack certainty. (Ashby et al., 1966) In addition, a career is often considered isolated from one's personal and family life; however, it is interconnected and determines life satisfaction. (Ginsberg, 1971).

Career indecision not only impacts career growth but also has a significant impact on family relations, anxiety, and other mental health concerns. Indecision also indicates a problem in making a decision that can be abnormal and differs from being undecided, which is a normal component of one's development. (Osipow, 1999).

Personality is an essential component that determines career decisions and development. (Rossier, 2015). Personality refers to consistency and distinctiveness in behavior over a period of time. It consists of traits that make people think, feel, and behave in a particular way. (Passer & Smith, 2013, p. 460). These traits are indicative of an individual's consistency and predisposed way of acting in different situations, which makes them unique. These underlying personality traits guide people to make decisions, interpret events, and assess different situations. According to Allport (1961) personality is the dynamic organization within the individual determine his characteristics behavior and thought. Personality assists in predicting what people normally like and their likelihood of behavior in the future.

Big Five-Factor Model of Personality

Different theoretical perspectives have been conceptualized to understand personality. One of the most popular measures of personality is one proposed by Costa & McCrae's (1992) Five-Factor Model of Personality. Industrial and organizational psychologists have relied on this model to understand vocational choices (Harriet et al., 1996). The Five-Factor Model is the most extensively utilised trait system. Trait theories often follow a continuous distribution rather than distinct personality types, where high and low scores indicate relative traits as indicated in Figure 1.2. The theory includes five broad traits that can be remembered with the acronym OCEAN: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (Costa & McCrae, 1999).

Figure 1.1 Five-Factor Model of Personality

The Five-Factor Model of Personality		
Factor	Low Score Description	High Score Description
Neuroticism	Calm, Even-tempered, Self-satisfied, Comfortable, Unemotional, Hardy	Worrying, Temperamental, Self-pitying, Self-conscious, Emotional, Vulnerable
Extraversion	Reserved, Loner, Quiet, Passive, Sober, Unfeeling	Affectionate, Joiner, Talkative, Active, Fun-loving, Passionate
Openness to Experience	Down-to-earth, Uncreative, Conventional, Prefer routine, Uncurious, Conservative	Imaginative, Creative, Original, Prefer variety, Curious, Liberal
Agreeableness	Ruthless, Suspicious, Stingy, Antagonistic, Critical, Irritable	Softhearted, Trusting, Generous, Acquiescent, Lenient, Good-natured
Conscientiousness	Negligent, Lazy, Disorganized, Late, Aimless, Quitting	Conscientious, Hardworking, Well-organized, Punctual, Ambitious, Persevering

Taken from McCrae and Costa (2003)

Career choices are often indicative of a person’s personality traits. It assists in understanding the characteristics contributing to career indecision and identify the protective factors for decision-making (Rossier, 2015). Understanding the relationship between personality and career indecision still needs to be investigated to help individuals in the rapidly changing professional environments.

Counselling process often aims to understand the client’s trait contributing to overall career growth. These personality traits aids in understanding a person’s way of thinking, feelings and acting. Research by Adya & Kaiser (2005) advocates the use of bog-five personality framework in studying decision-making process in adolescents. Additionally, previous researchers have stipulated the role of five-factor model (Costa & McCrae, 1999), in career indecision. Among these traits neuroticism and extraversions tend to be linked with career indecisions (Di Fabio et al., 2013). Studies are yet to determine how individual difference pave paths for career indecision.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study employed a quantitative and descriptive correlation research approach.

Objective

1. To study the correlation between personality and career indecision.
2. To see the difference among high-school, undergraduate, and post-graduate students on career indecision.
3. To find out the differences in career indecision among male and female students.

Hypothesis

- H1. There would be a significant negative relationship between career indecision and conscientiousness personality trait.
- H2. There will be gender differences in career indecision.

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- H3. There will be no difference between high-school, undergraduate, and post-graduate students on career indecision.
- H4. There would be a significant impact of personality traits on career indecision.

Variables

Independent variable

- Personality

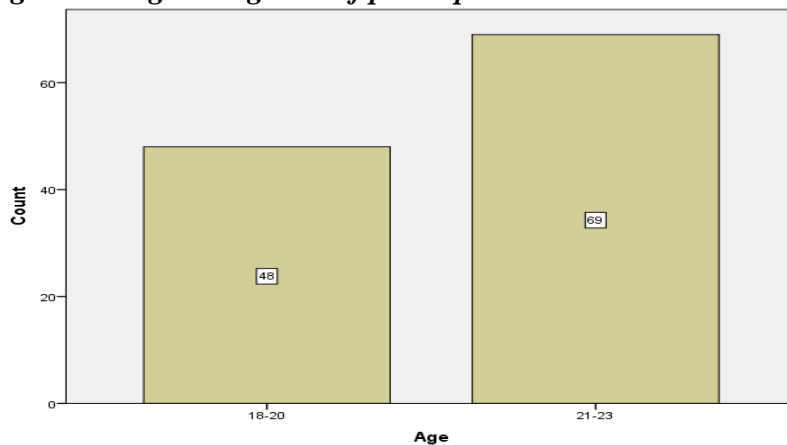
Dependent variable

- Career Indecision

Sample

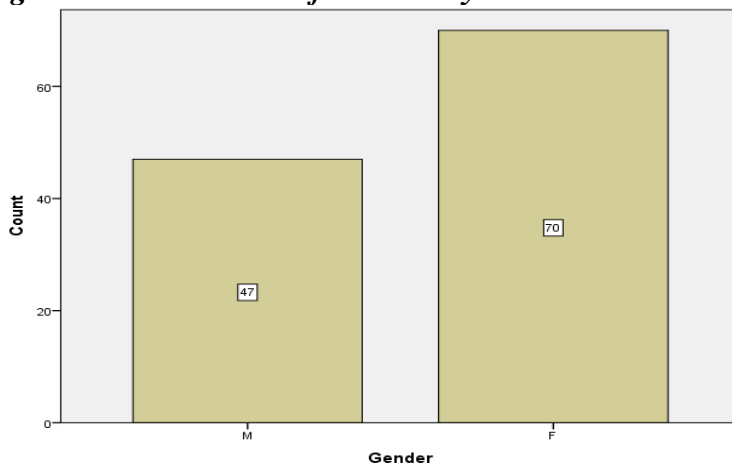
In the present study, high school and university students aged between 18 and 23 were selected using convenience and snowball sampling from schools and universities based in India. Out of a total of 117 participants, 48 belonged to the 18–20 age bracket, while 69 were members of the 21–23 age group (see Figure 1.2). Altogether, 47 males and 70 females took part in the study. Lastly, 25 of them were high schoolers, 58 were undergraduates, and 34 were postgraduates studying in the commerce, arts, and science streams who joined the study voluntarily. The frequencies are graphically represented and explained below.

Figure 1.2 Age Categories of participants



Note. Number of participants in 18-20 group = 48, and 21-23 = 69

Figure 1.3 Distribution of students by Gender



Note. Male = 47, Female = 70

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Table 1.1 Stream of Education

	N	%
Humanities	31	26.5%
Commerce	27	23.1%
Science	59	50.4%

Table 1.2 Education level of participants

	N	%
HIGH-SCHOOL	25	21.4%
UNDER-GRADUATE	58	49.6%
POST-GRADUATE	34	29.1%

Description of test

The data was obtained using a demographic information form, Mini IPIP-BFM-20 questionnaire and Career Decision Scale.

- 1. Demographic Form :** The demographic form contained the background details of the subjects which included their name, age, education level, education stream and consent to participate in the study.
- 2. Mini IPIP-BFM-20 questionnaire:** Based on the 50-item IPIP-FFM (Goldenberg, 1999), Donnellan et al., 2006 constructed a Mini IPIP 20-item shorter form to measure five-factor personality traits. They looked at the Mini-IPIP in several studies, proving that it had acceptable reliability and showed patterns of relationships with the longer IPIP-FFM when the measure was compared to various FFM facets and other personality measures.
There are four phrases for each of the five traits that describe the behavior and are measured on a five-point Likert scale. A total score was generated for each of the five scales by adding the scores for each item on each scale.
- 3. Career Decision Scale (CDS, by Osipow et al., 1987):** The career decision scale was used in order to understand the career indecision scores of participants. It is a 19-item self-report measure that is used to assess the career decision status of individuals aged 14–23 years. It contains a certainty scale (items 1 and 2) and an indecision scale (items 3–18). This is a four-point Likert scale, ranging from not at all like me (1) to exactly like me (4). For the present research, only items 3–18 were included and calculated to measure career indecision. The participants' higher levels of career indecision were indicated by their higher overall scores on these 16 items.
The internal consistency coefficient for the indecision scale was 0.8. Moreover, other studies have found reliability ranging from 0.82 to 0.89 (Hartman, 1983; Osipow, 1987). The total scale's reliability scores are high, which indicates good reliability. The scale also has high construct and concurrent validity as mentioned in the manual (Osipow, 1987).

Procedure

The collection of data involved constructing an online and offline form which were distributed through several social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and email). Participants who had access to the internet were asked to participate in the study. Additionally, those who were enrolled in either high school, Bachelor's, or Masters programmes at various institutions and universities across India were part of the research.

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The candidates were notified about the task's objectives and method in advance. They were also informed about their confidentiality rights and requested for their permission before proceeding with the data collection.

After agreeing to the consent form, they filled the demographics form along with IPIP- short personality, general decision-making style (GDMS), and career decision scales respectively.

Statistical analysis

For the purpose of analysis, quantitative data were analysed by employing descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS (version 29.0) software. Pearson Bivariate Correlation, Linear Regression, Independent T-test, and a One-way ANOVA were applied to verify the hypothesis.

RESULTS

The research methodology and design used for the study were specified in the previous section. The variables used in this study were subjected to descriptive inferential statistics. Furthermore, hypotheses were examined, and outcomes were obtained after using data analysis to examine the variables.

Descriptive Statistics

The primary aim of the study was to understand how personality traits affect career Indecision. Extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness were the five independent variables used to measure personality traits. The dependent variable was career uncertainty. The calculated means and standard deviations for each variable are shown in Table 1.3. In comparison to other personality traits, openness had the highest mean value (M = 14.68). The average rating for career indecision was 35.96 with a standard deviation of 10.46.

Table 1.3 Descriptive statistics

Variables	Sub-Category	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Personality traits	Extraversion	117	11.31	3.292
	Agreeableness	117	13.30	2.182
	Conscientiousness	117	12.69	3.428
	Emotional Stability	117	11.22	2.460
	Openness	117	14.68	2.638
Career indecision	Career Indecision	117	35.96	10.469
	Valid N (listwise)	117		

Inferential Statistics

The study used different Inferential analysis techniques with the aim of determining the relationship between the variables and testing the hypothesis.

1. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation

H1. There would be a significant negative relationship between career indecision and conscientiousness personality trait.

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Table 1.4 Correlation between career indecision and conscientiousness

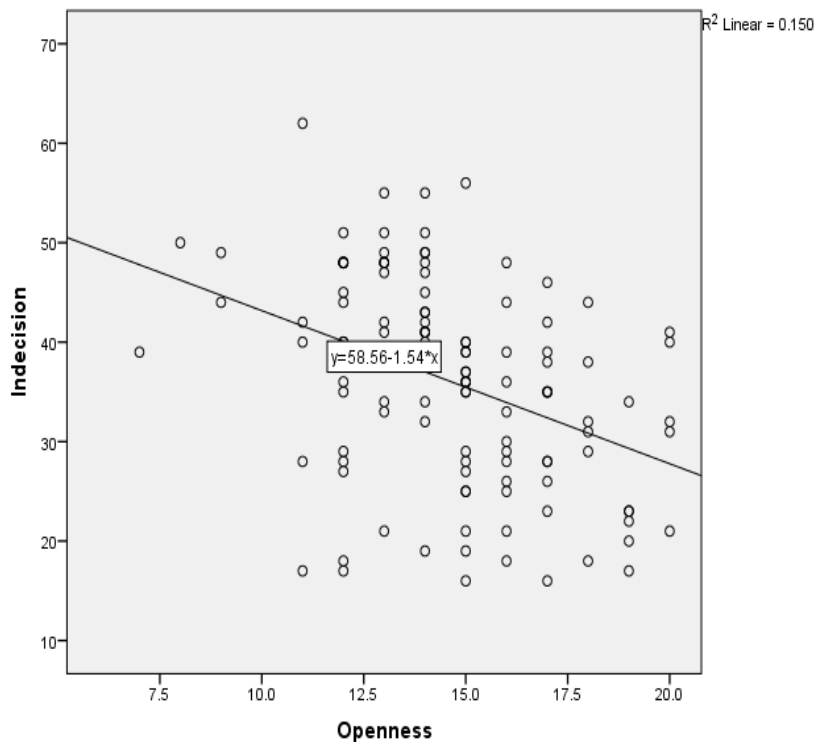
		Indecision
Extraversion	Pearson Correlation	.007
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.941
	N	117
Agreeableness	Pearson Correlation	-.010
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.918
	N	117
Conscientiousness	Pearson Correlation	-.193*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.037
	N	117
Emotional Stability	Pearson Correlation	.093
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.318
	N	117
Openness	Pearson Correlation	-.388**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001
	N	117

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Conscientiousness and career indecision were inversely correlated, $r(117) = -.193$, $p = .37$. According to this, a person with a higher conscientiousness personality trait would have more career certainty. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted. Moreover, it was also observed that career indecision was more negatively related to openness ($r = -.388$; $p = 0.01$), within personality traits as indicated in Table 4.3.

Figure 1.4 Scatter-plot showing correlation between openness personality trait and career indecision



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2. T-Test

H2. There will be gender differences in career indecision

Table 1.5 Mean difference in Career Indecision in relation to gender.

	Gender	M	SD	Sig.	t	Mean Difference
Indecision	Male	37.49	8.441	0.07	1.301	2.561
	Female	34.95	11.58			

An independent-sample t-test was conducted to compare career indecision for males and females. There were no significant differences ($t(115) = 1.301, p = .196$) in the scores of males ($M = 37.49, SD = 8.441$), and females ($M = 34.95, SD = 11.58$). The magnitude of the differences in the mean (mean difference = 2.56, 95% CI = -1.338 to 6.460) was very small. Hence, the hypothesis was not supported.

3. ANOVA

H3. There will be no significant difference between high-school, undergraduate, and post-graduate students on career indecision.

Table 1.6 One-way ANOVA on the indecision scores of the students as regard to their education level.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	54.717	2	27.359	.246	.782
Within Groups	12660.069	114	111.053		
Total	12714.786	116			

The hypothesis tested if career indecision of students differed across education levels. Participants were divided into three groups (Group 1: High-School; Group 2: Under-Graduate; Group 3: Post-Graduate). The ANOVA results $F(2, 116) = 0.246, p > .005$, indicated that there is no significant difference among career indecision based on education levels. Hence the hypothesis is accepted.

4. Regression

H4. Personality style significantly influences career indecision.

Table 1.7 Multiple regressions on personality trait predicting career indecision.

Predictors	B	R ²	F	P
Openness	-.388	.15	20.361	<.001

In order to study the impact of personality type on the dependent variable (career indecision), multiple regression was conducted. The results indicated that only the openness personality trait among the five traits was a significant indicator of variance, with $R^2 = 0.15, F(1, 116) = 20.361, p < 0.001$. The hypothesis is partially accepted.

DISCUSSION

The study primarily aimed to investigate the impact of personality traits on career indecision. It identified dominating personality traits that had a significant influence on students' career indecision. Lastly, it also explored the differences in gender, and level of education with respect to career indecision.

Career indecision is often experienced when adolescents transit from secondary schooling to higher education or employment. People seeking career counselling frequently express anxiety about their career dilemma (Savickas, 2011). One of the factors contributing career indecision is an individual's personality traits.

Personality shapes an individual's behaviour and predicts career and job success (Penny, David & Witt, 2011). Conscientiousness, one of the five traits, has previously been connected with career certainty by scientific researchers. (Dahanayake & Priyashantha, 2020; Lounsbury, Hutchens, & Loveland, 2005). Individuals who score high on this attribute prefer to work hard and strive for goal attainment, as well as examine situations before making decisions. The study hypothesized the negative correlation between conscientiousness personality trait and career indecision. The results (Table 1.4) supported the hypothesis and a negative significant relationship between the two variables was found.

Furthermore, using regression analysis, the study aimed to investigate the effect of personality traits on indecision scores. Some unexpected results indicated that the overall traits didn't have significant impact on career indecision but openness trait negatively influenced career indecision. Hence, open-mindedness was found to be indicative of low career-indecision. A possible explanation behind this could be the characteristics associated with openness personality traits. It pushes an individual to experiment, discover new ideas and embrace novel experiences.

Kaur (2020) studied the interrelation between males, females and career decision-making. It was observed that there were no significant differences in gender and its impact on career decision-making. However, Fabio et al. (2013) and Aswani (2020) discovered variations in gender in regard to indecisiveness and career maturity respectively. To gain a better understanding, an independent t-test was run to find out if differences in gender prevail. The results indicated that there is no significant difference in career indecision with respect to career indecision.

Finally, an ANOVA test showed no significant differences in career indecision between and level of education. The level of education (high school, bachelor's degree, graduate school) was found to make no difference regarding career decisions. From this, it can be concluded that indecision is prevalent in all areas and at all levels of education.

Overall, it was observed that some of the results were consistent with the previous researchers, however some new themes were also identified. The study provides an insight into the relationship between the personality trait to be adapted for career certainty. It also is important for career counsellors, parents, schools who can help students adapt and identify appropriate decision style and help build shape their personality.

Implications

The findings are especially pertinent in the domains of career and vocational psychology. Career uncertainty is a major concern among high school and university students. Career

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counsellors can utilise personality scales to better understand their clients and assist them in making adjustments. With the help of this, they can understand the underlying factors and traits contributing to indecision.

Furthermore, the findings have significance for counselling services in schools and colleges, which may assist students in mapping out their career aspirations by knowing their personality patterns. Institutes can undertake interventions targeted to increase conscientiousness and openness in thinking in young individuals from their initial years.

Limitation and Recommendations for future research

The current study aimed to uncover prominent traits related with career indecision and understood the relation between gender, education level with career decisions. However, the present research has certain shortcomings. The study was not able to consider other contingent factors relate to career indecision. Future research could focus on seeing the longitudinal impact of these traits on career-satisfaction, procrastination, anxiety levels. Lastly, research in the field of career indecision could be done with context to changing environment and intervention strategies to help students manage career indecision.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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