

A Study on the Relationship between Personality and Suicidal Ideation

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to investigate the “relationship between personality and suicidal ideation” among Mizo Adolescents. The study comprised a total of 300 adolescents (150 males and 150 females) from several colleges and schools in Aizawl, Mizoram. The individuals were assessed using the Adult Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire (Reynolds, 1991b) and the NEO-FFI-3 (McGrae & Costa, 2004). According to the results, the tests were reliable among the Mizo adolescents. Suicidal ideation, as well as all five personality traits, revealed gender difference. The personality trait 'Openness' was shown to have a significant negative relationship with 'Suicidal Ideation' (- 0.150**). According to further analysis, 'openness to experience' was proven to be a strong predictor of suicidal ideation.

Keywords: *Personality, Suicidal Ideation, Adolescents, Gender, Openness, Mizo*

Suicidal ideation has received increased attention worldwide as it is believed to be a prior step to a suicide attempt and completed suicide. Many young people have shown increased signs of suicidal ideation and attempts, and suicide attempt seems to be at its peak during adolescence. Among 15-24 years old, suicide has become the third most common reason for death (Anderson & Smith, 2005). Likewise, suicide has been found to be the second most common cause of death among college students (Schwartz, 2006).

Depending on the ambient interaction and stressful events, personality may be a valuable predictor of suicidal risk (Zokaitluangi, 2014). Personality is a set of measurable traits or characteristics that a person exhibits. Research findings suggest gender differences in the different personality domains of the Big Five Personality Traits—openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. (Weisberg et. al., 2011; Feingold, 1994; Costa et al., 2001; Lippa, 2010). The gender that scores higher on one trait exhibits the psychological states triggered by that particular trait with more frequency or intensity than the gender with a lower score (Weisberg et.al, 2011). Females tend to be higher in extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, and conscientiousness than males across most nations (Feingold, 1994; Schmitt et. al, 2008). On the contrary, another study found no significant gender difference in extraversion and openness to experience. In other studies, male students are found to be higher in Conscientiousness (Gaikwad, 2021).

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Quite a number of research has been done on the relationship between suicidal ideation and the five-factor personality traits in recent years. Duberstein et al., (2003) found that higher levels of neuroticism and lower levels of openness to experience are associated with a history of suicidal ideation. An association between low levels of extraversion and a history of suicide attempts was also found.

It was found that a person high in neuroticism and low in agreeableness had an increased risk of suicide (Batty and colleagues, 2018; McCann, 2010). Soltaninejad and colleagues (2014) also revealed a relationship between the Big Five personality traits and suicidal ideation. Overall, from what we have gathered from most research findings, each trait of the five-factor model of personality has its own implication in the phenomenon of suicide. Openness to experience, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism are independently influential for suicidality, with neuroticism being the strongest predictor (Ifeyanichukwu & Chico, 2021). Recently, a higher level of introversion has also been found to be associated with suicidal thoughts (Boot et al., 2022).

Based on the above literature highlighted, the present study aims to explore the role that personality plays in suicidal ideation, as well as exploring the gap between the genders.

The **objectives** for the present study are:

- To find out the psychometric adequacy of the test(s) on the population— mizo adolescents.
- To find out if there are any gender differences in the two psychological scales used.
- To find out the relationship between the different traits of personality and suicidal ideation.
- To find out the predictability of personality traits on suicidal ideation.

Hypothesis

Following the objectives, the following hypotheses are set forth for the conduct of the study:

- There will be gender differences in the sub-scales of NEO-FFI-3.
- There will be gender differences in Suicidal Ideation.
- There will be statistically significant relationship between personality traits and Suicidal Ideation.
- Traits of personality will predict suicidal ideation.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Using incidental sampling, 300 college students (N=300, Males=150, Females=150) were used as participants for the present study. The age range is between 15 and 23 years. The samples were taken from various schools and colleges in Aizawl, Mizoram. Students from different semesters and streams were included in the study.

Measures

The psychological tools used for the study are presented under:

- **Adult Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire:** The Adult Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire (ASIQ; Reynolds, 1991a) is a 25-item self-administered measure of suicidal thoughts and preoccupations. A 7-point scale is used to assess the number and frequency of recent and more distant suicidal thoughts. Summing the ratings yields a total score, with higher values indicating higher levels of suicidal thoughts. Internal consistency,

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test-retest reliability, and acceptable validity have all been found in studies of the ASIQ's psychometric features (Reynolds 1991a; Reynolds 1991b).

- **Neo Five-Factor Inventory– 3: The NEO-FFI-3 is a personality test derived from the NEO-PI-R. There are 60 items** in total, 12 items each come from the five personality domains: Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. The objects are graded on a scale of 1 to 5. It can be offered to individuals or groups of people. The Cronbach's alpha ranges from 0.75 to 0.82 (Costa & McGrae, 2004).

Procedure

The researcher had a brief self-introduction before the start of the test at each college and school visited. A summary of the test and instructions were given. The researcher solved the doubts that the participants had before and during the test. The signed consent form was obtained from all the participants and the questionnaires were administered in the classrooms during the school/ college hours. Few data were also obtained from the general population who met the criteria for the present study.

RESULTS

The reliability coefficients of the scales were calculated first, and they were found to be sufficient for ASIQ ($\alpha = 0.925$) and each of the subscales of personality - openness to experience ($\alpha = 0.510$), conscientiousness ($\alpha = 0.499$), extraversion ($\alpha = 0.575$), agreeableness ($\alpha = 0.513$), neuroticism ($\alpha = 0.42$).

Comparing the Mean and Standard Deviation of the two genders and the whole population in the two psychological scales used, suicidal ideation - ASIQ (female $M=34.78$, male $M=32.90$), NEO-FFI-3 - neuroticism (female $M=28.29$, male $M=25.89$), openness (female $M=28.81$, male $M=27.67$), agreeableness (female $M=28.34$, male $M=26.27$) and conscientiousness (females $M=26.04$, male $M=25.59$), have higher means for females than males. On the other hand, in extraversion (females $M=25.71$, male $M=26.15$), males are slightly higher.

Table 1: Table showing Gender Differences

Scales	t-test for Equality of Means			Mean Difference
	T	df	Sig.	
ASIQ	-0.688	298	0.492	-1.880
Openness	-2.132	298	0.034	-1.133
Conscientiousness	-0.843	298	0.400	-0.447
Extraversion	0.739	298	0.460	0.440
Agreeableness	-3.644	298	0.000	-2.067
Neuroticism	-4.619	298	0.000	-2.400

Table 1 shows the t-test results for suicidal ideation and the five personality traits. The result showed a significant difference between males and females on Agreeableness ($p < .01$) and Openness to experience ($p < .05$) while no significant gender difference in Suicidal Ideation, Conscientiousness, and Extraversion were found.

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Table 2: Relationship between subscales of personality and ASIQ for the whole sample

Scales	ASI Q	Neurotici sm	Extraversi on	Opennes s	Agreeable ness	Conscientious ness
ASIQ	1	0.097	-0.103	-0.150**	-0.011	-0.101
Neuroticism	-	1	-0.117*	0.378**	0.214**	-0.139*
Extraversion	-	-	1	0.195**	-0.023	0.233**
Openness	-	-	-	1	0.193**	0.137*
Agreeableness	-	-	-	-	1	0.079
Conscientiousness	-	-	-	-	-	1

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

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

The relationship between suicidal ideation and the five personality factors was determined using the Pearson correlation coefficient (Table 2). Suicidal ideation and openness to experience have a substantial negative relationship ($r = -0.150$), as seen in Table 2. According to the findings, the higher the amount of openness to experience, the lower the level of suicidal ideation.

Table 3: Results of Linear Regression Analysis with Personality Trait (Openness) as the predictor and Suicidal Ideation as a Criterion

Scales	T	Unstandardized Beta	Sig.
Openness	-3.515	-0.94	.001

Dependent Variable: ASIQ

Based on the findings of the association between personality traits and suicidal ideation, and in order to fulfill the last objective, further analysis of linear regression was undertaken using suicidal ideation as the dependent variable and openness to experience as a predictor or an independent variable. Table 3 reveals that 'openness to experience' ($p < 0.01$, $t = -3.515$) is a significant 'predictor of suicidal ideation'. Thus, we can say that a lower level of openness to experience increases the likelihood of suicidal ideation.

DISCUSSION

The rate of death by suicide has been on the rise among young people all over the world. The factors that may have contributed to these tragic deaths remain controversial. We can infer from different studies that many factors may play a significant role in suicide. Various researches have provided proof to show that personality may also have a great influence. In most cases, suicidal ideation is believed to precede suicide attempts and actual suicide. Keeping this in mind, the purpose of this study was to investigate the association between suicidal ideation and personality among Mizo adolescents, with the hope that the findings may contribute to enhancing mental health and preventing suicide.

We have found that gender differences are present in two different personality traits – openness to experience and agreeableness among the target population. Thus, we can partially accept hypothesis (i). We fail to accept hypothesis (ii) stating that there will be gender differences in suicidal ideation. Multiple frameworks can be used to analyze the findings of the current study that females score higher than males on psychological measures of suicidal ideation (ASIQ) and specific personality traits (neuroticism, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness) in the NEO-FFI-3, while males score slightly higher

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on extraversion. A combination of biological, psychological, and sociocultural elements may be present in each of these variations.

Gender differences in the Big Five Personality Traits - openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism - have been reported in previous studies (Feingold, 1994; Costa et al., 2001; Lippa, 2010; Mac Giolla & Kajonius, 2019). Psychological sensations triggered by one attribute appear more frequently or intensely in the gender with a higher score than in the gender with a lower score (Weisberg et al., 2011). Women exhibit greater degrees of extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, and conscientiousness than males in most nations (Feingold, 1994; Schmitt et al., 2008; Mac Giolla & Kajonius, 2019). Another research, however, revealed no significant differences between men and women in extraversion and openness to experience (South et al., 2018).

Another study found that female respondents are about average in openness, conscientiousness, and agreeableness while being low in extraversion and neuroticism, whereas male respondents are low in openness and conscientiousness while being about average in extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Tamban & Maningas, 2019; Russo & Stoll, 2020). This seemed to contradict the findings of the research by Weisberg et al. (2011) in which there is no significant gender difference in personality except in agreeableness. Another study also discovered gender disparities, indicating that females have higher degrees of extraversion while males are more open to new experiences (Kawamoto and colleagues, 2015).

In contrast to our findings, the majority of earlier research studies have found gender variations in suicide ideation (Allison et al., 2001). Generally, females have greater rates of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts than men, even though males have a higher incidence of committed suicide as they use more lethal methods (Alsalman, 2016, Stephenson et al., 2006, Lu et al., 2020; Freeman, 2017, Oner et al., 2007). According to Beautrais and colleagues (2002), young girls are nearly twice as likely as young men to report suicidal thinking and suicide attempt behaviour. Mendizabal et al. (2019) also discovered gender disparities in suicidal thoughts in their recent investigations.

The results of Pearson's correlation indicated a negative association between suicidal ideation and openness to experience ($r = - 0.150$, $p < 0.01$) thereby, allowing the partial acceptance of hypothesis (iii). This suggests that people with higher levels of openness are likely to have lower levels of suicidal ideation. Suicidal thoughts are typically less frequent among people who are more receptive to new experiences. Their intellectual curiosity, appreciation for art, and sensitivity to beauty might have given them hope and enthusiasm to survive in the world. However, although significant, the correlation coefficient is small. Thus, it is not the only or dominating factor impacting suicidal ideation, suggesting that there are other factors at play as well. This demonstrates the intricacy of suicidal ideation and the interaction of multiple biological, psychological, and environmental elements.

By highlighting the importance of nurturing openness to experience and its constituents, such as creativity and flexibility, as part of all-encompassing approaches to mental health and suicide prevention, this understanding can influence preventative strategies and interventions.

According to Duberstein et al., (2000), there is a link between openness to experience and suicidal ideation. In contrast to our findings, it was found that individuals who are low in

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openness to experience report less suicidal ideation. Increased openness to experience and neuroticism were also found to be related to suicide ideation (Heisel et al., 2006; Duberstein et al., 2000; Baertschi et al., 2018; Na et al., 2020). However, variables associated with a reported lack of suicidal ideation, like low openness, may not reduce the risk of completing suicide. Paradoxically, in some patients with low openness, a lack of suicidal ideation can lead to an increased risk of suicide (Duberstein et al., 2000). The pattern for openness differs significantly. Even though greater openness enhances the probability of reporting suicidal thoughts, previous research has shown that it may lessen the risk of a suicide death. Low levels of openness, on the other hand, may suppress reports of suicidal ideation in at-risk patients and increase the probability of poor outcomes by compromising clinical attention (Heisel et al., 2006).

Suicide risk was found to be higher in people with a high level of neuroticism (Afolabi, Karatu & Ogunleye, 2020; Manning et al., 2021) and a low level of agreeableness (McCann, 2010; Batty and colleagues, 2018; Na et al., 2020). Suicidal thoughts and the Big Five personality traits were revealed to be associated by Soltaninejad and colleagues (2014). Overall, the majority of research data imply that each of the five personality factors has a distinct impact on the suicide phenomenon. Ifeanyichukwu and Chico (2021) found that neuroticism is the strongest predictor of suicidality, followed by openness to experience, conscientiousness, and agreeableness.

Since we have found a significant relationship between suicidal ideation and one of the personality traits – Openness to experience, these two variables were subjected to regression to see if personality significantly predicts suicidal ideation. The findings reveal that ‘openness to experience’ ($p < 0.01$, $t = -3.515$) is a significant predictor of Suicidal Ideation. Hence, we partially accept hypothesis (iv).

This finding indicates that if openness to experience is present at high levels, we can infer that suicidal ideation will be reduced. Similar to our findings, some studies found that low informant-reported openness may be a risk factor for completed suicide (Duberstein, Conwell, & Caine, 1995; Afolabi et al., 2021). People with major depression who are low in Openness to experience may be at increased risk for completing suicide. (Duberstein, 1995). Ayub (2015) also revealed that openness to experience predicts suicidal ideation. However, most recent studies reveal that higher degrees of openness to experience are linked to an increased likelihood of suicidal thoughts and, at least in one research, a higher chance of suicide. (Duberstein et al., 2000; Heisel et al., 2006; Sullivan, 2019; Na et al., 2020).

GENERAL CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

Our findings portray that there are disparities between males and females in two personality profiles, indicating that females possess higher levels of agreeableness and openness to experience. Our findings contrast existing literature which suggests gender differences in suicidal ideation. Among many, social and cultural factors may play a role in this contradictory result. It can also be said that personality traits specifically, openness to experience, play a significant role in suicidal ideation, and hence, suicidality may be reduced by enhancing the level of openness to experience. Further, it can be said with certainty that there is a need to identify and enhance moderating factors that can buffer the effects of personality traits on suicidal ideation.

Although the current study provides insight into the personality profile of suicidal individuals, it has several limitations. Most importantly, the sample of this study is a small

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population from a particular region of the state of Mizoram in India. Moreover, a convenience sampling technique was used which might have affected its generalizability. Employing a random sampling technique is desirable for future studies and a wider, and more diverse sample can be expected to yield more significant results. It would be most worthwhile for future studies to conduct a cross-sectional study to get a clear picture of the role of personality in suicidal ideation across various age groups. Further studies may also include other variables to explore the various factors that play a role in the gender disparities found and the relationship between personality and suicidal ideation.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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APPENDIX

Table A1 Correlation between Personality and Suicidal Ideation

	Asiq	Neuroticism	Extraversion	Openness	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness
Asiq	1	0.097	-0.103	-0.150**	-0.011	-0.101
Neuroticism	-	1	-0.117*	0.378**	0.214**	-0.139*
Extraversion	-	-	1	0.195**	-0.023	0.233**
Openness	-	-	-	1	0.193**	0.137*
Agreeableness	-	-	-	-	1	0.079
Conscientiousness	-	-	-	-	-	1

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

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