

Research Paper

## Self-esteem and Big Five Personality as Predictors of Happiness

Varsha Kumari<sup>1</sup>, Deepak Kumar<sup>2</sup>, Dhruv Kumar<sup>3\*</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Happiness is often viewed as an individual matter and independent of societal conditions. They emphasize that an individual's happiness is not necessarily tied to a nation's well-being. There are several ways to enhance individual happiness. Key contributors to happiness are maintaining strong social relationships, self-esteem, personality traits etc. This study was, thus, envisaged to examine the role of self-esteem and personality traits in enhancing happiness. The study was conducted among undergraduate students in various bachelor's programs at colleges affiliated with L.N. Mithila University. 390 students (150 boys and 240 girls) from different colleges in Darbhanga town participated in the study to ensure a representative sample. The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire developed by Argyle and Hills (2002), the Big Five Personality Scale constructed by John and Srivastava (1999) and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale developed by Rosenberg (1979) were used for the data collection. On computing Pearson's correlation coefficient, it was found that happiness was strongly associated with self-esteem. At the same time, a mixed association was found between happiness and the five dimensions of personality. Positive association with personality traits like openness and extraversion, negative correlation with neuroticism and conscientiousness and no association with the agreeableness dimension of personality. Multiple regression analysis was computed to evaluate the predictive power of self-esteem and Big Five personality traits on happiness. The analysis revealed that self-esteem ( $B = .644$ ,  $p < .000$ ) emerged as a significant predictor of happiness. Findings were discussed in the light of earlier research.

**Keywords:** *Happiness, Self-esteem, conscientiousness, Openness, neuroticism, extraversion*

The *World Happiness Report* is published every year by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (Sachs, 2019). It ranks national happiness based on respondents' self-assessments of their lives. In the 2019 World Happiness Report, Finland was ranked as the happiest country globally, followed by Denmark, Norway, Iceland, and the Netherlands. Meanwhile, our country ranked 133rd. The top-ranked countries tend to excel in six key factors: income, healthy life expectancy, freedom, social support, generosity and trust.

<sup>1</sup>Asst. Professor, K.S.R. College, Sarairanjan, Samastipur

<sup>2</sup>PGTeacher, L. M. High School, Anandpur, Darbhanga

<sup>3</sup>Professor, Department of Psychology, LNMU, Darbhanga

\*Corresponding Author

Received: January 16, 2025; Revision Received: May 07, 2025; Accepted: May 10, 2025

## Self-esteem and Big Five Personality as Predictors of Happiness

Happiness, however, is often viewed as an individual matter. Researchers argued that happiness is a personal choice. It is independent of societal conditions. They emphasize that an individual's happiness is not necessarily tied to a nation's well-being. Happiness is often revolving around happy or unhappy individuals while well-being is revolved around nations. The Sanskrit term *Ananda* translates to bliss or happiness. In ancient Indian texts like the Vedas, Upanishads, and the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Ananda* is described as eternal bliss achieved through the end of the cycle of rebirth. The *Bhagavad Gita* states that those who renounce the fruits of their actions and surrender themselves to the divine achieve liberation from the cycle of life and death (*samsara*) (Patton, 2005). Swami Vivekananda emphasized that Hindu philosophy recognizes diverse paths to *Ananda*, reflecting the unique nature of individuals and their journeys toward happiness.

Kiran Kumar (2000) observed that not all Indian perspectives on happiness are spiritual. Indian society has long embraced both material and spiritual worldviews, encompassing hedonistic, collective, and transcendental approaches. The hedonistic perspective focuses on fulfilling desires, especially sensory ones, and prioritizes pleasure. In contrast, the transcendental view aspires to universal well-being and harmony. Happiness, being subjective, does not rely on external conditions. The collectivist perspective acknowledges a spectrum, where some people are entirely hedonistic, others are spiritual, and the majority fall somewhere in between.

### *Psychological Perspective of Happiness*

Positive psychologists have identified several ways to enhance individual happiness. Key contributors to happiness are maintaining strong social relationships with partners, family members, close friends, and broader networks through work and social organizations. Physical exercise and meditation practices also play significant roles in fostering happiness. Additionally, financial income can increase happiness, although its impact may level off or even diminish once basic needs are met and no further financial gains are achieved (Seligman et al., 2005).

Happiness can be broadly defined as “an individual's overall assessment of positive and negative emotional experiences and satisfaction with life”. It encompasses both affective and cognitive components. The affective component is also known as the *hedonic level*. It pertains to the degree of pleasant emotions a person experiences. The cognitive component, on the other hand, is referred to as *contentment*. It refers to the extent an individual perceives their aspirations as being fulfilled (Bruni, 2004; Sirgy et al., 2006).

Argyle and his colleagues (1989) described happiness as the average level of satisfaction in a certain period of time, characterized by a predominance of positive emotions and a relative absence of negative emotions. Similarly, Diener et al. identified three dimensions of happiness: frequent positive emotions, infrequent negative emotions, and an average level of life satisfaction. Furnham and Cheng (2000) further differentiated between happiness and life satisfaction. They defined happiness as a temporary state of joy that is shorter in duration and less stable, whereas life satisfaction represents a more enduring and stable joyful mood.

### *Self-Esteem*

Self-esteem refers to “an individual's overall subjective emotional evaluation of their own worth”. It is essentially a self-judgment or attitude toward oneself, encompassing beliefs like, “I am capable of handling challenges,” or “I am meaningful.” This concept has become

## Self-esteem and Big Five Personality as Predictors of Happiness

a popular area of research among social psychologists because it is seen as a strong predictor of various outcomes, such as academic achievement (Marsh, 1990) and happiness (Baumeister et al., 2003).

Self-esteem can also be domain-specific. For instance, one might believe they are a skilled scriptwriter and feel positive about that particular ability. Additionally, self-esteem is often considered a cultural phenomenon. Research suggests that low self-esteem is more prevalent in individualistic cultures, such as in Western societies, while it is less common in collectivist cultures like Japan (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999).

Having healthy self-esteem often leads individuals to believe they deserve happiness. This understanding is vital, as fostering positive self-esteem enhances the capacity to treat others with respect, kindness, and goodwill. It encourages richer interpersonal relationships while minimizing destructive ones. Furthermore, higher self-esteem is linked to greater happiness and an improved ability to manage stress. Individuals with high self-esteem are more likely to take on challenging tasks compared to those with low self-esteem (Schacter et al., 2009).

The association between self-esteem and life satisfaction is more pronounced in individualistic cultures. High self-esteem also correlates with greater forgiveness in close relationships; individuals with high self-esteem are likely to be more forgiving than those with low self-esteem (Eaton, Wardstruthers, & Santelli, 2006). Overall, self-esteem is associated with significant outcomes, such as academic success, happiness (Baumeister, 2003), and relationship satisfaction, including in marriage (Orth & Robins, 2014).

### ***Big Five Personality Traits***

In 1990, Digman proposed a five-factor model of personality, which was later expanded by Goldberg (1993) to provide a more comprehensive framework. These five dimensions represent the foundational structure of personality traits (O'Connor, 2002). Commonly referred to as the Big Five or the OCEAN model, the framework includes: openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism. This taxonomy is widely recognized as a fundamental model for understanding personality traits (Rothmann & Coetzer, 2003).

The five factors are as follows:

- 1. Openness to Experience:** It reflects the creativity and curiosity of an individual. People marked high on this dimension are willing to explore new ideas.
- 2. Conscientiousness:** Indicates efficiency, organization, and a strong sense of responsibility.
- 3. Extraversion:** Associated with energy, sociability, and an outgoing nature.
- 4. Agreeableness:** Reflects compassion, friendliness, and a cooperative attitude.
- 5. Neuroticism:** Relates to emotional sensitivity, nervousness, and vulnerability to stress.

Each of these traits has subdimensions, representing specific aspects within the broader domains. These subdimensions help further refine the understanding of individual personality profiles while maintaining the hierarchical structure of the Big Five. This model continues to be a cornerstone in personality research and psychology.

Several studies have explored the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and happiness, with neuroticism and extraversion emerging as the most influential factors. Costa

## Self-esteem and Big Five Personality as Predictors of Happiness

and McCrae (1989) observed that individuals high in extraversion tend to experience more frequent positive emotions. Similarly, Cloninger (2013) found that extroverts report higher levels of happiness compared to those with lower extraversion scores. Conversely, high levels of neuroticism are negatively associated with happiness. Cloninger (2013) reported that individuals with low neuroticism scores not only experience greater happiness but also report higher life satisfaction than those with higher neuroticism levels.

Personality traits are considered significant determinants of happiness. For instance, higher extraversion levels are associated with an increase in positive emotions such as enthusiasm, happiness, and energy (Albuquerque, Lima, Matos, & Figueiredo, 2013). Extraversion is also linked to lower rates of depression (Senf & Liao, 2013). On the other hand, neuroticism has a negative relationship with positive affect and is strongly associated with negative affect, which includes emotions like anger, fear, and guilt (Albuquerque et al., 2013).

### *Objective*

The primary aim of this study was to explore the role of Big Five personality traits and self-esteem as correlates of happiness among undergraduate students of both sexes.

## METHODS

### *Sample*

The study was conducted among undergraduate students enrolled in various bachelor's programs at colleges affiliated with L.N. Mithila University. A total of 390 students (150 boys and 240 girls) from different colleges in Darbhanga town participated in the study to ensure a representative sample. Their responses were collected and analysed to meet the research objectives.

### *Measures*

- 1. Oxford Happiness Questionnaire:** This questionnaire was developed by psychologists Michael Argyle and Peter Hills (2002) at Oxford University. This questionnaire consists of 29 items designed to measure happiness. It uses a six-point Likert scale. The scores are ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 6 (strongly disagree).
- 2. Big Five Personality Scale:** Constructed by John and Srivastava (1999), this scale contains 44 items that assess five dimensions of personality. It employs a five-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.
- 3. Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES):** Developed by Rosenberg (1979), this 10-item scale measures global self-worth by evaluating both positive and negative feelings about oneself.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected were analysed using statistical techniques such as Pearson's correlation, t-tests, and multiple regression to evaluate the study's hypotheses.

### *Self-Esteem and Happiness*

A hypothesis was proposed suggesting a significant positive correlation between self-esteem and happiness. Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated for self-esteem and happiness. It was found that the correlation between self-esteem and happiness ( $r = .34$ ) was statistically significant, suggesting that as self-esteem increases, happiness also rises. This aligns with Hill (2015), who reported that high self-esteem correlates with greater happiness and life satisfaction (Smith, 2000). Baumeister's (1997) findings support the idea that self-esteem influences happiness by encouraging risk avoidance to protect self-worth, ultimately

## Self-esteem and Big Five Personality as Predictors of Happiness

fostering greater life satisfaction. Past research (Diener & Diener, 1995; Schimmack et al., 2004) has consistently shown moderate to strong correlations between happiness and self-esteem.

**Table 1: Correlation Among Self-Esteem, Big Five Personality, and Happiness**

	Happiness
Self-esteem	.340**
Openness Dimension	.559**
Conscientiousness Dimension	-.224**
Extraversion Dimension	.309**
Agreeableness Dimension	.004
Neuroticism Dimension	-.186**
Total Big Five Personality	.095

**Significance:  $p < .01$**

### **Personality Traits and Happiness**

To explore the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and happiness, a hypothesis suggested a significant correlation between these variables. Results revealed that happiness was positively correlated with openness and extraversion. Traits like curiosity, energy, and social engagement in extroverts contribute to higher happiness levels (Woo & Ahn, 2015). Openness was linked to imaginative and flexible thinking, which fosters an enriched experiential life (Aluja et al., 2003). However, happiness was negatively correlated with neuroticism and conscientiousness. While neuroticism's association with negative emotions like anxiety and guilt explains its inverse relationship with happiness, conscientiousness showed an unusual negative correlation. This may be due to individuals' focus on emotional control and preventive behaviours, which could suppress overt expressions of happiness (Manczak et al., 2014). Agreeableness showed no significant correlation, despite prior studies indicating its predictive role in happiness (Graziano et al., 2007).

### **Predicting the Effect of Self-Esteem and Big Five Personality on Happiness**

Multiple regression analysis was computed to evaluate the predictive power of self-esteem and Big Five personality traits on happiness. The analysis revealed a significant effect of self-esteem ( $B = .644$ ,  $p < .000$ ) on happiness, indicating that an increase in self-esteem leads to a proportional rise in happiness. However, the Big Five personality traits collectively did not significantly predict happiness ( $B = -.060$ ,  $p = .420$ ). This outcome may be attributed to the neuroticism dimension, which negatively impacts happiness and could skew the overall result.

**Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis**

Model	R	R Square	F	Predictors	B	Signi.
1	.353	.125	18.330, $p < .000$	Self-esteem	.644	$p < .000$
				Big Five Personality	-.060	$p < .420$

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Big Five Personality, Self-esteem
- b. Criterion: Happiness

### CONCLUSION

The study highlights a mix of correlations between personality traits and happiness. Positive associations were found between happiness and traits like extraversion and openness, while negative associations were noted with neuroticism and conscientiousness. Results further reinforce the crucial role of self-esteem in fostering happiness, as evidenced by significant correlations and predictive analyses. Additionally, the findings suggest that happiness is influenced by various factors, including personality, self-esteem, age, gender, and academic engagement. These insights offer a nuanced understanding of the interplay between self-esteem, personality, and happiness, aligning with prior research while also presenting intriguing directions for future studies.

### REFERENCES

- Albuquerque, I., Lima, M., Matos, M., & Figueiredo, C. (2013). The interplay among levels of personality: The mediator effect of personal projects between the big five and subjective well-being. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 14(1), 235-250.
- Aluja, A., & Blanch, A. (2004). Replicability of first-order 16PF-5 factors: An analysis of three parcelling methods. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 37(4), 667-677.
- Argyle, M. (1989). Book review of *Empathy and Its Development*. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 10(4), 393-395.
- Baumeister, R. F. (1997). Identity, self-concept, and self-esteem: The self-lost and found. In *Handbook of personality psychology* (pp. 681-710). Academic Press.
- Baumeister, R. F., Campbell, J. D., Krueger, J. I., & Vohs, K. D. (2003). Does high self-esteem cause better performance, interpersonal success, happiness, or healthier lifestyles? *Psychological science in the public interest*, 4(1), 1-44.
- Bruni, A., Gherardi, S., & Poggio, B. (2004). Entrepreneur-mentality, gender and the study of women entrepreneurs. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 17(3), 256-268.
- Cloninger, C. R. (2013). What makes people healthy, happy, and fulfilled in the face of current world challenges? *Men's Sana Monographs*, 11(1), 16.
- Costa Jr, P. T., & McCrae, R. R. (1990). Personality disorders and the five-factor model of personality. *Journal of personality disorders*, 4(4), 362-371.
- Diener, E. (1996). Traits can be powerful, but are not enough: Lessons from subjective well-being. *Journal of research in personality*, 30(3), 389-399.
- Diener, E. and Diener, M. (1995), "Cross-cultural correlates of life satisfaction and self-esteem", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 68, pp. 653-663.
- Digman, J. M. (1990). Personality structure: Emergence of the five-factor model. *Annual review of psychology*, 41(1), 417-440.
- Eaton, J., Struthers, C. W., & Santelli, A. G. (2006). Dispositional and state forgiveness: The role of self-esteem, need for structure, and narcissism. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 41(2), 371-380.
- Furnham, A., & Cheng, H. (2000). Perceived parental behaviour, self-esteem and happiness. *Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology*, 35(10), 463-470.
- Goldberg, L. R. (1993). The structure of phenotypic personality traits. *American psychologist*, 48(1), 26.
- Graziano, W. G., Habashi, M. M., Sheese, B. E., & Tobin, R. M. (2007). Agreeableness, empathy, and helping: A person × situation perspective. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 93(4), 583.
- Heine, S. J., Lehman, D. R., Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1999). Is there a universal need for positive self-regard? *Psychological review*, 106(4), 766.
- Hills, P., & Argyle, M. (2001). Emotional stability as a major dimension of happiness. *Personality and individual differences*, 31(8), 1357-1364.

## Self-esteem and Big Five Personality as Predictors of Happiness

- Hills, P., & Argyle, M. (2002). The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire: a compact scale for the measurement of psychological well-being. *Personality and individual differences*, 33(7), 1073-1082.
- John, O. P., & Srivastava, S. (1999). The Big-Five trait taxonomy: History, measurement, and theoretical perspectives.
- Kiran Kumar, S. K. (2003). An Indian conception of well-being. In J. Henry (Ed).
- Manczak, E. M., Zapata-Gietl, C., & McAdams, D. P. (2014). Regulatory focus in the life story: Prevention and promotion as expressed in three layers of personality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 106(1), 169.
- Marsh, H.W. (1990). "Causal ordering of academic self-concept and academic achievement: A multi-wave, longitudinal path analysis". *Journal of Educational Psychology*. 82 (4): 646–656.
- O'Connor, B. P. (2002). A quantitative review of the comprehensiveness of the five-factor model in relation to popular personality inventories. *Assessment*. 9 (2): 188–203.
- Orth U.; Robbins R.W. (2014). "The development of self-esteem". *Current Directions in Psychological Science*. 23 (5): 381–387.
- Patton, L. L. (2005). *Bringing the gods to mind: mantra and ritual in early Indian sacrifice*. Univ of California Press.
- Rosenberg, M. (1979). *Conceiving the Self*. New York: Basic Books.
- Rothmann, S., & Coetzer, E. P. (2003). The big five personality dimensions and job performance. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 29(1), 68-74.
- Ryff, Carol D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(6), 1069-1081.
- Sachs, J. D. (2019). Introduction to the 2019 global happiness and wellbeing policy report. *Global Happiness and Wellbeing*.
- Schacter, D. L., Gilbert, D. T., & Wegner, D. M. (2009). *Psychology*. Macmillan.
- Schimmack, U., Oishi, S., Furr, R. M., & Funder, D. C. (2004). Personality and life satisfaction: A facet-level analysis. *Personality and social psychology bulletin*, 30(8), 1062-1075.
- Seligman, M. E., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: empirical validation of interventions. *American psychologist*, 60(5), 410.
- Sirgy, M. Joseph, A. C. Michalos, A. Ferriss, R.A. Easterlin, D. Patrick & W. Pavot (2006). The Quality-Of-Life (QOL) Research Movement: Past, Present and Future. *Social Indicators Research*, 76, pp. 343-466.
- Smith, E. R., & Mackie, D. M. (2015). Dynamics of group-based emotions: Insights from intergroup emotions theory. *Emotion Review*, 7(4), 349-354.
- Woo, H., & Ahn, H. J. (2015). Big Five Personality and Different Meanings of Happiness of Consumers. *Economics & Sociology*, 8(3), 145.

### **Acknowledgment**

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

**How to cite this article:** Kumari, V., Kumar, D. & Kumar, D. (2025). Self-esteem and Big Five Personality as Predictors of Happiness. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 13(2), 1516-1522. DIP:18.01.138.20251302, DOI:10.25215/1302.138