

Counselling and its effect on personality dimensions of young adults

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■ **ABSTRACT :** This study aims to examine the effect of counselling on personality dimensions among young adults. The current article presents the mean differences of personality dimensions among young adults before and after counselling. To conduct the study a sample of 120 young adults belonging to the age group of 20-40 years were selected. To measure the personality dimensions among young adults Big five personality inventory developed by Goldberg (1993) consisting of five dimensions such as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness was used. Highly significant mean differences were observed in all the dimensions of personality inventory. Young adults after intervention had significantly high scores in all the traits of personality and low score on neuroticism depicting better emotional stability after counselling. Therefore, it was found that counselling techniques were facilitative in bringing about positive changes in the personality among young adults.

■ **KEY WORDS:** Personality dimensions, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, Intervention, Counselling, Young adults

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Personality is an individual's characteristic style of behaving, thinking, and feeling (Schacter *et al.*, 2009). Personality of young adults is crucial as maladaptive patterns during this stage would lead to psychosocial impairment and subjective distress. Perceiving of oneself relating to the environment often results in dissatisfaction. Personality is shaped by experiences since childhood to adolescence and adulthood, it is likely that mental disorders occurring during these years may have influence on the personality as they grow older.

The five personality factors such as, Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness and

Conscientiousness are core to understand the personality of an individual. According to McCrae and Costa (2008) each of these factors are related to some Characteristic adaptations which can either promote or mar mental health. They are characteristic because they reflect the enduring psychological core of the individual, and they are adaptations because they help. Neuroticism (a tendency to experience dysphoric affect, sadness, hopelessness, guilt) is related to Low self-esteem, irrational perfectionistic beliefs, and pessimistic attitudes. Extraversion (a preference for companionship and social stimulation) is related to social skills, numerous friendships, enterprising vocational interests, participation in team

sports, club memberships. Openness to experience (a need for variety, novelty, and change) is related to interest in travel, many different hobbies, knowledge of foreign cuisine, diverse vocational interests, friends who share tastes. Agreeableness (a willingness to defer to others during interpersonal conflict) is related to forgiving attitudes, belief in co-operation, in offensive language, and reputation as a pushover. And conscientiousness (strong sense of purpose and high aspiration levels) is related to leadership skills, long-term plans, organized support network, technical expertise.

Of all the traits neuroticism is strongly associated to emotional instability and causes major personality changes in individual. In addition, persons high in neuroticism are often self-critical, sensitive to the criticism of others and feel personally inadequate (Watson *et al.*, 1994). Neuroticism is highly associated with mental and physical health problems compare to rest of all the other traits (Malouff *et al.*, 2006). A study conducted by Khan *et al.* (2005) found large effect sizes for the association between neuroticism and depression, generalized anxiety disorder, and panic disorder, and medium effect sizes for phobias, alcohol and drug dependence and antisocial personality disorder. Therefore, it was clear that personality can be a better predictor of mental health which require immediate attention to help individuals overcome these distress. The current study aim to provide intervention for individuals who had varied problems and approached counselling centres for help and find the effect of counselling on personality dimensions. The counsellors used a combination of therapies to facilitate individuals through the sessions.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

Young adults belonging to the age group of 20-40 years were selected for the study. Purposive sampling technique was adopted for the study (young adults who had approached counselling centres in order to seek help from professionals for their inability to deal with conflicts and other related problems were part of the study. An equal sample of 60 men and 60 women were selected for the study. To find out the personality dimensions among young adults, the investigator used "Big five personality Inventory" developed by Goldberg (1993). It assesses the degree to which participants evaluate their personality with respect to each dimension. The data on was collected in two stages one before counselling

sessions and the other after counselling. The collected data was coded and analysed using frequency, percentages and paired t-test.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the present investigation as well as relevant discussion have been summarized under following heads :

Extraversion :

From the Table 1 above it can be inferred that sixty eight per cent of young adults scored low on extraversion trait of personality whereas thirty two per cent scored high on the same. This means that nearly three fourth of the sample had low scores on extraversion trait of personality. Extraversion is marked by pronounced engagement with the external world. On the contrary low scores in extraversion results in quiet and disengaged in the outer world resulting in social anxiety. Feelings of loneliness contribute to feelings of depression, and it has been found that more medical and psychological problems are found in people that report being lonely (Rubinstein *et al.*, 1979). Younger adults are considered emerging adults, a transitional stage between late adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2004). Evidence suggests that this transition stage is stress-provoking, because failure to accomplish developmental tasks may impact the transition to a fully-adult lifestyle, and thereby thwart personal goals (Newman and Newman, 2008).

Agreeableness :

From the Table 1 it was evident that sixty three per cent of young adults scored low agreeableness trait of personality followed by thirty eight per cent in moderate category. This infers that more than fifty per cent of the sample were low on agreeableness. Low agreeableness refers to unfriendly and uncooperative nature. This might be because of stubborn and unwillingness attitudes of young adults and extreme negative emotions and harsh nature of putting themselves before anyone resulted in low scores on agreeableness. This affects the young adults well-being as people treat them as non-empathetic and stubborn.

Conscientiousness :

It was evident from the Fig. 1 that sixty per cent of the sample had scored low on conscientiousness trait of

personality whereas forty per cent scored high on the same. This reveals that more than fifty per cent of young adults were low on conscientiousness. Low on conscientiousness refers to be unconcerned with orderly surroundings or schedules, avoid difficult tasks or challenging goals, are satisfied with work that contains some errors, and make decisions on impulse or with little reflection. Young adults had lacked the motivation to achieve as they were not able to cope up with varied problems in different stages of life resulted in low scores. A study conducted by Roberts *et al.* (2003) found that constraint (a facet of conscientiousness) at age 18 positively predicted measures of occupational attainment, worksatisfaction, work involvement, and financial security at age 26. Conscientiousness-related traits have been shown to be related to additional social environmental factors that contribute to positive health outcomes, such as high socio-economic status (Judge *et al.*, 1999), marital stability and greater religiosity (Cramer, 1993; Kelly and Conley, 1987).

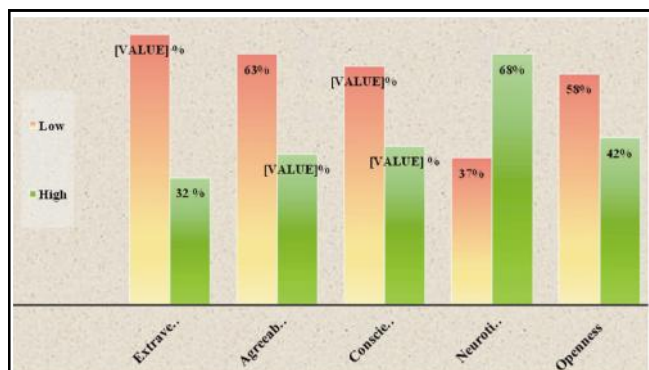


Fig. 1 : Personality dimensions of young adults before counselling

Neuroticism :

With regard to neuroticism high scores were noted sixty three per cent of the sample whereas thirty seven per cent of them scored low on neuroticism. This means that more than half of the sample scored high on

neuroticism trait of personality. People who score high in neuroticism are very emotionally reactive. A high score in neuroticism has a greater chance of feeling threatened or being in a bad mood in a normal situation. They may find it difficult to think clearly and cope with stress and worried most of the time. This leads to anxiety, immoderation and vulnerability. A study conducted Chapman *et al.* (2009) revealed that high Neuroticism and low Conscientiousness are frequently implicated in health-risk behaviours, such as smoking and overeating, as well as health outcomes, including mortality. Their associations with physiological markers of morbidity and mortality, such as inflammation.

Openness :

From the table it was observed that fifty eight per cent of sample had low scores on openness trait of personality while forty two per cent of them scored high on the same. This depicts that more than half of the sample had scored low on openness. Low scores on openness refers to least interested in new trends and inability to accept or follow changes, they are more radical and unconventional in nature which affects their social interactions and well- being. Several previous studies indirectly suggest that open people experience things differently: For instance, openness predicts performance on divergent thinking tasks (Kaufman *et al.*, 2016 and Silvia *et al.*, 2008), which require one to identify multiple diverse uses for ordinary objects. For open people this seems to happen effortlessly, suggesting a more flexible way of combining information, perhaps even at low-levels of perceptual processing.

Extraversion :

The above Table 2 clearly depicts that fifty four per cent of them scored high on extraversion trait of personality in post-test. This means that young adults had enhanced their skills after counselling in extraversion trait. This might be due to reduced stress levels and

Sr. No.	Personality dimensions	Low		High	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Extraversion	82	68	38	32
2.	Agreeableness	75	63	45	38
3.	Conscientiousness	72	60	48	40
4.	Neuroticism	44	37	76	63
5.	Openness	70	58	50	42

positive energies drive in through counselling session with the help of therapies. High scores on extraversion refers to improved self- confidence and self-esteem among young adults resulting decrease levels of depression and anxiety.

Agreeableness :

It was observed from the Table 2 that fifty four per cent of young adults scored high on agreeableness followed by forty six per cent in low category after counselling. This means that half of the sample scored high on agreeableness in post-test. This means that young adults were better able to interact with others and started looking at things in a more optimistic manner after counselling. Therapies helped the clients in restructuring themselves with more positive regard.

Conscientiousness :

From the Table 2 it can be inferred that seventy one per cent of sample scored high on conscientiousness in post-test followed by twenty nine per cent in low category. This reveals that nearly three fourth of young adults had better conscientiousness compared to pre-test. High scores on conscientiousness, consists of self-discipline, reliability, achievement striving, and organization. This might be because young adults had worked out on their goals and striving to work towards them which were possible due to less stress and anxiety after counselling. Self-discipline and goal oriented ness was the most influencing factors which made them score high in the post-test. A study conducted by Baumeister *et al.* (2006) revealed that regular exercises in self regulation can produce broad improvements in self regulation (like strengthening a muscle), making people less vulnerable to ego depletion. Furthermore, it shows that ego depletion moderates the effects of many traits on behaviour, particularly such that wide differences in socially disapproved motivations produce greater differences in behavior when ego depletion weakens the

customary inner restraints.

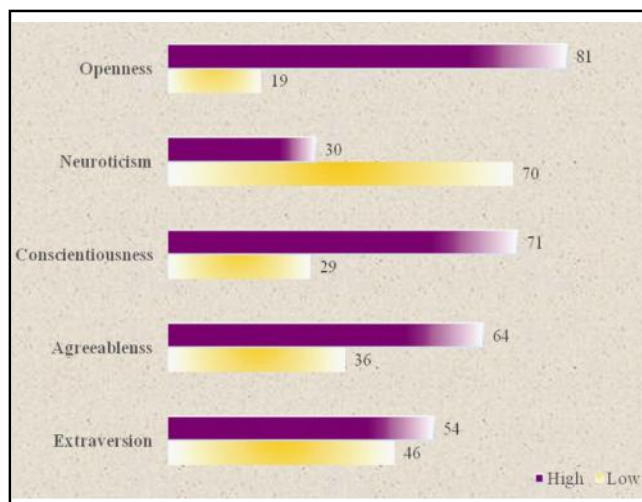


Fig. 2 : Personality dimensions of young adults after counselling

Neuroticism :

With regard to neuroticism it was clear that sixty eight per cent of the sample scored low on neuroticism followed by thirty per cent in high category after counselling. This mean that nearly three fourth of the sample scored low on neuroticism trait of personality in post- test. Low scores on neuroticism refers to better emotional stability and less reactive to stress. Through varied relaxation techniques young adult’s frustrations and anger were decreased which allowed them to think and reflect more adequately resulted in low scores in neuroticism trait of personality after counselling.

Openness :

With regard to openness eighty one per cent of the sample scored high and rest of them were in low category. This infers that majority of the young adults enhanced on their openness trait compared to pre-test. Openness refers to willingness to accept change and ability to think creatively out of the box. This might be

Sr. No.	Personality dimensions	Low		High	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Extraversion	55	46	65	54
2.	Agreeableness	43	36	77	64
3.	Conscientiousness	35	29	85	71
4.	Neuroticism	84	70	36	30
5.	Openness	23	19	97	81

because counselling facilitated young adults to solve problems thinking in different perspectives which made them draw best possible solutions for their divergences. This was slowly taken as nature of young adults and were better able to open themselves to new encounters in life. The results were further supported by Victoria *et al.* (2017) revealed that memory was most related to openness, with higher openness linked to better memory and lower risk for memory impairment, controlling for age, atrophy, education, and intelligence quotient (IQ). Lower neuroticism was also related to better memory, and lower conscientiousness to memory impairment.

In total, it was observed from Fig. 2 that with respect to post-test majority of the young adults had better scores on all the personality dimensions compared to pre-test. Among the personality traits openness, conscientiousness and neuroticism traits were prominently differences, as majority of the young adults reported high on openness, conscientiousness and low on neuroticism. There were less differences found in extraversion and agreeableness. However, it was observed that young adults had comparatively improved on these traits in post-test.

The Table 3 depicts the details of differences in means of personality dimension with respect to pre and post counselling. It was striking that the mean scores of all the dimensions such as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness were high when compared to pre-test.

Because of the complexity and comorbidity of the problems in young adults they come across various situations which leave them aghast for over a period. Traumatic experiences such as the loss of a loved one or a serious road accident can trigger mental health issues. When something traumatic occurs, it can completely change a person's perception of the world. This can result in feelings of anger, helplessness, fear and guilt. These may persist long after the event has

happened. As a person tries to deal with and contain their negative feelings, unhealthy behaviours can emerge. It has become increasingly clear that certain personality traits can make individuals more prone to developing certain mental health outcomes such as aggression, less sociable and isolated. It is also identified that certain personality traits are passed down to the young adults by their parents. Johnson *et al.* (2012) found that individuals who had experienced verbal abuse during childhood were three times more likely to have borderline, narcissistic, obsessive-compulsive and paranoid personality disorders during early adulthood, compared to those who did not experience verbal abuse.

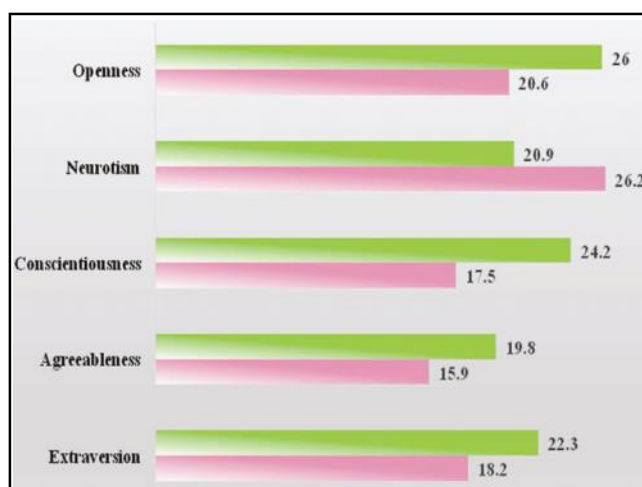


Fig. 3 : Mean differences in personality dimensions among young adults before and after counselling

Juxtapose to pre-test scores significant high mean scores were observed in post counselling. Young adults had scored high on all traits such as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness. The low score on neuroticism dimension indicate the personality traits as calm, stable, unemotional and contented whereas the high score determines tense, nervousness, anxious

Table 3 : Mean differences in personality dimensions of young adults before and after counselling

Sr. No.	Personality dimensions	Pre		Post		t-value	p-value
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1.	Extraversion	18.2	5.9	22.3	5.4	-19.4**	0.000
2.	Agreeableness	15.9	5.6	19.8	6.6	-8.5**	0.000
3.	Conscientiousness	17.5	7.1	24.2	6.9	-16.0**	0.000
4.	Neuroticism	26.2	7.4	20.9	4.9	-11.92*	0.000
5.	Openness	20.6	7.1	26.0	6.1	-14.7**	0.000

Note:* and ** indicate significance of values at P <0.05 and <0.01, respectively

NS=Non- significant

and moody. It shows that the selected sample had low score on this dimension, which says they are relaxed and emotionally well-adjusted individuals post counselling. Counselling helped individuals in dealing with their problems through better perspective and new ways for the young adults to cope. Creative therapies were explored to channelize the emotions experienced by the young adults. The results of the study are in congruence with the study conducted by Roberts *et al.* (2017) a meta-analysis which has looked at 207 psychotherapy and related studies published between 1959 and 2013, involving over 20,000 participants, with measures of personality taken repeatedly over time. The analysis has found that just a few weeks of therapy is associated with significant and long-lasting changes in clients' personalities, especially reductions in the trait of Neuroticism and increases in Extraversion.

Another study which is in line with the results of the study conducted by Chambless and Stewart (2009) effectiveness review described previously, eleven studies involved the treatment of adults with social anxiety disorder. Results suggested that pre-test to post-test effect sizes for disorder specific symptom measures for social anxiety disorder were substantial ($d = 1.04$), suggesting that patients treated with Cognitive behaviour therapy for social anxiety disorder in clinically representative studies improved significantly from pre-test to when they completed treatment. In addition, Cognitive behaviour therapy for social anxiety disorder produced significant pre-test-post-test reductions in depression symptoms.

Conclusion :

The findings of the study reveal that Personality dimensions and strategies used in counselling were effective in better personality adjustments among young adults. Highly significant differences were observed between pre and post counselling on neuroticism, agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness and extraversion. Therefore it can be concluded that counselling was effective in better personality among young adults. The results were in line with study conducted by Kennon *et al.* (2002) revealed that increased levels of psychosocial and goal oriented ness were observed after intervention and bring about positive adjustments in life among the sample.

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