Study of Personality Factors and Family Problems as Determinant of Mental Health amongst College Students

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ABSTRACT

While all students face a range of mental health concerns, it is important to consider undergraduate students as a distinct group. Because these students face a unique set of circumstances which play an intricate role in the manifestation of mental health problems. Thus the aim of the present study was to determine the effect of different personality factors and family problems on mental health of college students. The participants were 225 (age range 18-21 years) students, randomly taken from Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh and Albarkaat Public School of Aligarh. A set of questionnaires namely NEO-Five Factor personality Inventory developed by Costa & McCrae (1992), Youth Problem Inventory used for measuring family problems developed by Sandhya Sharma (1979) and Mental Health Inventory (Jagdish & Srivastava, 1983) were used. Results of multiple regression analysis (step-wise) revealed that amongst all personality factors extraversion found to be significant predictor for positive self-evaluation; openness emerged as a significant predictor for perception of reality, agreeableness for integration of personality. Similarly, extraversion and conscientiousness significantly predict environmental competence dimension of mental health among students. However, family problems predict only two dimensions of mental health i.e. positive self-evaluation and environmental competence. Furthermore findings of *t*-test revealed that both male and female group of students differ significantly on extraversion, openness and agreeableness factors of personality. They also significantly differ on total mental health including integration of personality and environmental competence dimensions of mental health. But only on family problems no gender difference found. Present findings can be concluded as early detection for indications of mental health problems and understanding factors such as family problems and different factors of personality among students would promote better understanding of mental health in future.

Key words: Mental health, personality factors and family problems.

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INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a crucial psychological factor with respect to human behaviour. Available research evidence revealed that mental health offers an opportunity for investigation as an attribute of human resource development, in that empirical research findings indicated that mental health enhancements leads to a better utilization of resources while its impairment has led to serious negative and life consequences, especially towards students of graduation, they often face uncertainty regarding their next steps in both their professional and personal lives [5]. For instance, reviews etiology and prevention literatures, exploring association between problem and positive youth behaviours also reported that risky/unhealthy/anti-social behaviours, poor mental health and poor academic achievement are highly connected with and predict each other, while positive mental health strongly influences success and happiness [3]. According to W.H.O. mental health is an individual's state of well-being, when he or she realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to contribute to his or her community [18]. Similarly, mental health also described as the ability to balance desires, feelings, ambitions and ideas in one's daily living. It may also be understood as the behavioural characteristics of a person [2].

Though there are several factors which can influence mental health of all age group people, e.g. personality, sources of stress, social support etc. Previous research findings also shows that individuals who are high in personality factor i.e. neuroticism may show more emotional reactions whenever confronted with stressful situations. Similar findings also showed personality traits association with mental health outcome [8]. The researchers discovered that a higher level in conscientiousness would significantly decrease the probability of mental disorders as well as extraversion and agreeableness personality traits. Nonetheless, a higher level in neuroticism was found to be significantly contribute to mental disorders. Additionally mental health issues, such as those related to family relationships [11] and personality factors [7], [15] may also have reciprocal effects on college students, vocational including mental health functioning and success. Another study reported an association between personality traits like agreeableness, openness and subjective well-being [9]. The positive relationship indicated that an increase in neuroticism could lead to unhealthy mental health outcome. This result is consistent with the past research findings [19] which revealed that neuroticism can be associated with a single episode of a depressive symptom and on personality traits like extroversion and conscientiousness, these finding also

contradicts with [17] that indicated extraversion and conscientiousness associated with subjective well-being among students of university. In addition interaction between levels of family conflict and personality traits also helps to explain the differences in mental health outcome [14]. However mental health condition of college students may be affected by numerous factors, amongst all in the light of significance of mental health condition, in the present research, family problems and personality factors like neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness were taken to study mental health condition of undergraduate students.

Objectives

1. To determine the influence of family problems and different personality Factors on mental health and its different dimensions among college students.
2. To identify gender differences on family problems and different personality Factors.
3. To identify gender differences on mental health and its different dimensions.

Hypotheses

1. Mental Health of college students would be significantly predicted by family problems and different personality Factors.
2. There would be significant gender difference found on family problems and personality Factors among college students.
3. There would be significant gender difference found on mental health and its different dimensions among college students.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The present study consists of 225 undergraduate students both male (n=109) and female (n=116). The age range of the sample was 18-21 years, randomly taken from different faculties of Aligarh Muslim University Aligarh including both streams that is Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Social Sciences, data was also collected from undergraduate students of Albarkaat Public School of Aligarh.

Instruments Used

1. **NEO Five Factor Personality Inventory** is a 60 items (12 items per domain) version of the forms-S with five point ratings scale. The NEO-FFI show correlations of .75 to .89 and internal consistency values range from .74 to .89. The internal consistencies for each domain of personality reported in the manual were: N=.79, E=.79, O=.80, A=.75, C=.83 [4].

2. **Youth Problem Inventory** consists of four dimensions that are personal problems, family problems, socio-economic problems and educational problems, but we are interested in only one dimension that is family problems. Coefficient of correlation for the dimension of family problems was 0.69 and 0.92 was split-half reliability of the inventory [12].

3. **Mental Health Inventory** consist of 56 items based on six dimensions–viz. positive self-evaluation, perception of reality, integration of personality, Autonomy, group-oriented attitude, and environmental competence. Has four response categories i.e. always, often, rarely and never while the split-half reliability coefficient of the inventory was 0.73 and construct validity was 0.54 which confirm the standardization of the inventory [10].

Procedure

Firstly permission from the chairman of the selected faculties of A. M. U. Aligarh and principal of Albarkaat Public School of Aligarh was sought in order to carry out the study. Before administering questionnaires rapport was established with the students and was also ensured about the confidentiality of the research results. After given instructions the above mentioned questionnaires were administered in a group and scoring was done as per the instructions given in the manual.

Statistical analysis

For finding the most influencing predictor variable for the criterion variable that is mental health multiple regression analysis (step-wise) was computed. Also independent sample *t*-test used to find significant gender difference on the variables of the study.

RESULTS

Results of multiple regression analysis (step-wise) in **Table–1** revealed that amongst all personality factors 'extraversion' found to be significant predictor for positive self-evaluation dimension of mental health with multiple regression R=.244, R^2=.059, β=.244, F=8.07, p<.05. Another dimension of personality i.e. 'Openness' significantly predicts perception of reality dimension of mental health with R=.240, R^2=.057, β=.240,F=7.79, p<.05. Also 'agreeableness' found to be significant predictor for integration of personality with multiple regression R=.178, R^2=.032, β=.178, F=4.16, p<.05. Similarly, environmental competence dimension of mental health was predicted by extraversion and conscientiousness factors of personality, where value of multiple regressions for extraversion R=.321, R^2=.103, β=.321, F=14.70, p<.01. However, for conscientiousness R=.373, R^2=.139, β=.194, F=10.26, p<.01 respectively. The combined contribution of extraversion and conscientiousness in predicting environmental competence was 13.9% while the individual contribution of extraversion was 10.3% and conscientiousness 3.6% variance in environmental competence one of the dimensions of mental health among college adolescents.

Table-1:   Shows Results of Multiple Regression Analysis (step-wise) for Personality Factors on Mental Health among College Students.

Criterion Variable (Dimensions of Mental Health)	Predictor Variable (Personality Factors)	R	R^2	R^2 Change	β	F	Sig
Positive Self- evaluation	Extraversion	.244	.059	.059	.244	8.07	.005
Perception of Reality	Openness	.240	.057	.057	.240	7.79	.006
Integration of personality	Agreeableness	.178	.032	.032	.178	4.16	.043
Environmental Competence	Extraversion	.321	.103	.103	.321	14.70	.000
	Conscientiousness	.373	.139	.036	.194	10.26	.000

Note: R= Multiple regression, R^2 =combined contribution of the predictor variables on the criterion variable,R^2 change= individual contribution of the predictor variables on the criterion variable, β = it is similar as the coefficient of correlation, F= is the analysis of variance shows the significant value of the R^2

Further findings of **Table–2** revealed that family problems predict only two dimensions of mental health i.e. positive self-evaluation and environmental competence. With multiple regression for positive self-evaluation R=.235, R^2=.061, β=-.194, F=5.77, p<.05 and environmental competence R=.330, R^2=.099, β=-.210, F=8.50, p<.01. Furthermore findings also revealed family problems accounted 6.1% in the prediction of positive

self-evaluation and for environmental competence 9.9% respectively dimensions of mental

health among college students.

**Table-2:   Shows Results of Multiple Regression Analysis (step-wise) for Family
Problems on Mental Health among College Students.**

Predictor Variable	Criterion Variable (Dimensions of Mental Health)	R	R^2	R^2 Change	β	F	Sig
Family Problems	Positive Self-evaluation	.235	.061	.061	-.194	5.77	.018
	Environmental Competence	.330	.099	.099	-.210	8.50	.001

Note: R= Multiple regression, R^2 =combined contribution of the predictor variables on the criterion variable, R^2 change= individual contribution of the predictor variables on the criterion variable, β = it is similar as the coefficient of correlation, F= is the analysis of variance shows the significant value of the R^2

Findings of **Table–3** shows that there was significant difference found between male

and female group of students on different factors of personality i.e. extraversion (t=1.87,

p<.05), agreeableness (t=1.87, p<.05) and openness (t=2.81, p<.01). Results also revealed

that female students scored higher than male students in terms of mean score on all three

factors of personality.

**Table-3: Shows Significance of Difference between Male and Female College students
on Personality Traits.**

Dimensions of Personality	Male		Female		t
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Neuroticism	59.10	4.34	58.51	4.89	0.72
Extraversion	44.53	7.21	47.12	8.42	1.87*
Openness	46.76	5.01	49.72	6.74	2.81**
Agreeableness	34.92	7.28	37.49	8.25	1.87*
Conscientiousness	35.77	7.46	35.44	8.08	0.24

*Significant at .05 level   **Significant at .01 level

Results of t-test in **Table–4** show that male and female group of undergraduate

students did not differ significantly in terms of mean score on family problems.

**Table-4:   Shows Significance of Difference between Male and Female College students
on Family Problems.**

Variable	Male		Female		t
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Family Problems	25.45	4.14	25.43	4.39	.033

*Significant at .05 level   **Significant at .01 level

Findings of **Table–5** revealed that male and female students differ significantly on total mental health (t=3.12, p<.01) more specifically on two dimensions of mental health that is integration of personality (t=2.02, p<.01) and environmental competence (t=2.01, p<.01). Results also revealed that on integration of personality male students scored higher in terms of mean score than female students. However female students scored higher in terms of mean score on total mental health as well as on environmental competence one of the dimensions of mental health than their counterpart.

Table-5:   Shows Significance of Difference between Male and Female College students on Mental Health and its Dimensions.

Dimensions of Mental Health	Male		Female		t
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Positive Self-evaluation	28.08	3.33	27.66	4.11	.634
Perception of Reality	25.87	3.82	26.54	4.12	.965
Integration of Personality	28.79	4.11	25.47	3.31	2.02**
Autonomy	17.08	1.80	17.16	1.52	.278
Group oriented attitude	27.03	2.77	26.90	2.72	.281
Environmental Competence	26.03	3.34	29.28	4.68	2.01**
Total Mental Health	156.89	8.72	159.01	10.11	3.12**

*Significant at .05 level   **Significant at .01 level

DISCUSSION

The importance of maintaining good mental health is crucial for college students because they are the future of any developed and successful nation. Most of the youngsters face multiple problems laid down by society, family, school and colleges; reason may be anything but it may influence the mental health condition of surprising number of students. Thus the present research aims to study personality factors and family problems as determinant of mental health among college students. In this context the first objective of the present study was "to determine the influence of different personality factors and family problems on mental health and its different dimensions among college students". Findings of multiple regression analysis revealed that extraversion one of the personality factors significantly predict positive self-evaluation, openness significantly predicts perception of reality, and agreeableness predicts integration of personality. Similarly environmental competence dimension of mental health was significantly predicted by extraversion and conscientiousness (personality factors) among college students. Furthermore, results of

multiple regression analysis also revealed that family problems significantly predict two dimensions of mental health that is positive self-evaluation and environmental competence.

These findings show that our first hypothesis i.e. "mental health of college students would be significantly predicted by family problems and different personality factors" was proved to be true. Present results of the study also supported by earlier findings stated that poor mental health influenced by demographic characteristics, a high level of family conflict and a low level of family support [20]. Previous researches also stated that high scores on the basic traits of openness and conscientiousness, for example, may translate into the belief that the world is comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful [6] which in turn promotes better mental health condition [1].

According to the next objective of the present study we find out, whether male and female group of college students differ on family problems, personality factors and different dimensions of mental health. For this purpose independent sample t-test used and findings revealed that, male and female college students differ significantly on extraversion, openness and agreeableness factors of personality. Moreover findings also indicate that on all three personality factors female students scored higher in terms of mean score than their male counterpart. Our findings get support by similar results obtained in a study [13]. In their study they found significant difference between two groups i.e. male and female on personality characteristics where female students have higher scores in comparison to their male counterparts.

Furthermore results of t-test also showed that both the group of male and female college students did not differ significantly on family problems.

Above explanation of personality traits and family problems shows that the hypothesis "there would be significant gender difference found on family problems and personality traits among college students" was proved to be true for personality traits but rejected for family problems.

Findings of t-test also revealed that college students differ significantly on total mental health, including two dimensions that is integration of personality and environmental competence. Furthermore results of t-test also explore that in terms of mean score male students scored higher than females on integration of personality. However female college students scored higher on total mental health especially on environmental competence one of the dimensions of mental health than their counterpart.

The plausible explanation for the above gender difference on personality factors, family problems and mental health may be due to female students scored higher on positive

aspects of personality and total mental health more specifically on environmental competence one of the dimensions of mental health, which shows females have capability to take responsibility and adjust with situational demands, leads to good mental health condition. But no difference found on family problems among male and female group of college students. Though both the group of students score average level of mental health, inspite of that difference emerged on total mental health this may be due to the fact that male students spent different life style, have tension of career and vocational field as compared to female students. This may be the reason male students score some degree lesser but not poor on total mental health than female counterpart.

The above explanation shows that the hypothesis "there would be significant gender difference found on mental health and its different dimensions among college students" was proved to be true.

Conclusion

Family problems and certain personality factors like extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness emerged as significant predictors for some of the dimensions of mental health among college students. Further *t*-test revealed male and female group of students differ significantly on certain personality factors and total mental health, where on both female students scored higher in terms of mean score than their male counterpart, but no difference found on family problems.

Implications

Findings of the present study would be helpful for teachers, parents, educationist and psychologist to help college students by arranging facilities of counselling and intervention programs not only for students but also for parents to educate them how to handle family problems and helping youngsters at this crucial period of life, to overcome from these problems. This will automatically enhance mental health condition of students for good and enriched future life after entering the society, because they are expected to be elites of society. In addition according to the present findings male college students need more attention as compare to female students.

Limitations of the study

As its clear that every research is simply a single step in that area, which provide some information and leads to certain limitations with suggestion. The present study included

certain variables which can influence mental health. Secondly it comprise of only college students. Therefore, further studies in this area can be done cross cultural, including recent questionnaires and demographic variables.

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