

# Personality Traits in relation to Altruism: “Yes” or “No”

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## ABSTRACT

Altruism is the principle and moral practice of concern for happiness of other human beings, resulting in a quality of life both material and spiritual. There is a connection between the altruism and personality traits. To find out the relationship between personality traits and altruism, the present study aims to explore the association between personality traits and altruism among young adults. For the purpose of the study, samples of 100 students belonging to age group 18-25 years were randomly selected. The NEO-FFI and Altruism Test were administered on the subjects. A correlational design was used in the present study. Results of the study showed that neuroticism and openness trait is negatively correlated with altruism, on the other side; Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Extraversion to experience are positively associated with altruism.

## 1. Introduction

Personality is defined as “the characteristic set of behaviors, cognitions, and emotional patterns that evolve from biological and environmental factors” (Corr, Philip J.; Matthews, Gerald, 2009). While there is no general agreement upon definition of personality, but still many of the theories focus upon motivation and psychological interactions with one's environment (Sadock, Benjamin; Sadock, Virginia; Ruiz, Pedro (2017). According to trait based personality theories, personality is a specific kind of trait that helps in the prediction of an individual behavior. On the other hand, behaviorally based approach explains personality in terms of learning and habits. But in general, most theories have a viewpoint that personality is a relatively stable trait of an individual (Corr et al., 2009).

Personality is the complex phenomena of mental characteristics that distinguish the individual from the others and make them unique. The personality of the individual contains different kind of patterns of thought and emotions which helps an individual to do something and to say things in particular ways. When we talk about personality at basic level, it is expressed into the form of temperament or emotional tone. However, it also includes the combination of our value, belief system and expectations we have. There are lots of personality factors which are helpful in shaping a personality of an individual. However, the way we acquire the values, beliefs and expectations are related to socialization and unique experiences, especially during childhood.

There are basically three most important factors that contribute to individual personality. These are:

- **Heredity:** these factors are related to our biological and physiological mechanism of body. All inherited physical qualities constitute in determining the type of his/her personality. There are three main type of personality in general i.e. those who are short and stout, tall and thin, and muscular and well proportioned. There are many more factors that contribute in the development of personality by interacting with the social environment i.e. height, physical defects, weight, health and strength etc.

- **Psychological factors:** the focus of the psychologist is more on the psychological factors which include our hidden motives, our thinking pattern and attitude towards oneself and others, our own interest which is acquired by exploring our self to the environment, will power and character, the way we interact with others and our own intellectual capacities i.e. intelligence. These are the factors which determine how we react with the situation and thus affect our personality, growth and direction.

- **Environment:** Some scientists have an orientation to biological factors but some focus upon environmental factors and experiences. In today's world, many scientists are in favour of nature-nurture interaction (Parke, 2004) and have a view that personality can be moulded by providing the fruitful kind of environment to the individual (Hetherington, Parke, Gauvain, & Locke, 2006). The important aspects of environment are physical environment, social environment and family environment.

An individual personality also includes some other traits like helping others, interacting with others in a positive way. One should also focus upon the relationship between the different traits of the personality and the helping nature i.e. altruism. Because as we all know human being is a social animal which cannot live in isolation. It means we need someone to interact with us, so, that we can share our feelings and emotions with others. It has been shown from the previous studies also that a significant relationship exist between personality traits and altruism. A study conducted by Oda, Machii, Takagi, Kato, Takeda, Kiyonari, Fukukaawa and Hiraishi in 2014 showed that there is a significant relationship between conscientiousness and altruism, agreeableness and altruism, openness and altruism.

Altruism is a doctrine and practice of moral concern in which the focus is on the happiness of other human beings and/ or animals which leads in improvement of quality of life including both material and spiritual. It is a traditional strength of many cultures and is a very important aspect of many religious norms and secular worldviews, but still the concept which is related to “others” means toward which our concern

should be directed vary from culture to culture and religions. In a normal way of living standard, we can't ignore the singular nature of the subject, but there is a realization of the traits which is related to personality of the individual while relating with others, with a true, direct and personal interaction with each of them. Altruism focus on both of the things i.e. on a single person and everyone present in the community. It is the law which is related to the love which directs the ego and his neighbor.

Altruism is a general concept in which an organism is an individual who performs some of the action which is beneficial for oneself i.e. feeling of pleasure, improvement in quality of life and it also increases the probability of survival or reproduction, and it also benefits the other individual also in a direct or indirect manner, without expecting anything in return or compensation for that action. Steinberg & David in 2010 defined altruism in clinical setting as "intentional and voluntary actions that aim to enhance the welfare of another person in the absence of any quid pro quo external rewards". Altruism is different from the feelings of loyalty in the sense that latter is related to social relationships, but altruism does not focus upon relationships. There are lots of debates where one argues that whether the true altruism is possible in human psychology or not. It has been well explained by theory of psychological egoism which suggests that no single act of sharing, helping others or sacrificing oneself is truly altruistic, as the individual gets an intrinsic reward in the form of personal gratification. The proof of this argument depends on whether intrinsic rewards qualify as "benefits".

Sun and Zhang conducted a study in 2018 in which it was revealed that helping behavior i.e. altruism is negatively associated with neuroticism and it has a positive relationship with extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience.

## 2. Purpose of the study

The main aim of the study is to find out the association between personality traits and altruism. How the different domains of the personality are related with altruism and what kind of effect is there of these traits on helping behavior.

## 3. Problem

The present study investigates the association between personality traits and altruism among college students.

## 4. Objectives of the study

To study the relationship between personality traits and altruism among college students.

## 5. Hypotheses of the study

There will be a significant association between personality traits and self esteem.

- There will be a significant relationship between the different traits of personality i.e. neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness and altruism among college students.

## 6. Research design

The present study was done with the help of correlational design.

## 7. Methodology

**Participants:** The sample of the present study includes 100 students falling in the age group 18-25 years. The participants were randomly selected from PDM University, Bahadurgarh.

### Instruments

Following tools were used to collect data-

**NEO-FFI:** This scale was given by Paul T. Costa and Robert R. McCrae, 1992. It consists of 60 items; 12 items each allotted to the five domains of personality being measured: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. The retest reliability of the test is .79, .79, .80, .75 and .83 for N, E, O, A and C respectively.

**ALTRUISM TEST:** Developed by Rushton and his colleagues in 1981, it's a five point scale – never, once, more than once, often and very often and consists of 20 items. Each item is scored from 0 to 4. The split half reliability of the questionnaire is estimated to be 0.91.

## 8. Procedure

After the finalization of the tools for the present study, the respondents were contacted for the collection of the data and the rapport was established with the respondents by making them feel comfortable. After the establishment of the rapport, the questionnaires were handed over to the participants. Enough time was given to the participants for questionnaires to read and fill. After the completion of the questionnaires, questionnaires were taken back and the participants were thanked for their precious time devoted and for the cooperation. The data was analyzed with the help of Pearson product moment correlation.

## 9. Statistical Analyses

For attaining the objectives of the study, collected data was recorded for the statistical analysis. A Pearson product moment correlation was used to analyze the results.

## 10. Results

**Table 1: Showing Inter Correlational Matrix between personality traits and altruism among young adults (n=100).**

Personality Traits	Altruism
Neuroticism	-.365**
Extraversion	.249*
Openness	-.216*
Agreeableness	.083
Conscientiousness	.403**

\*Sig at .05 level, \*\* Sig. at .01 level

The table 1 lists the correlation coefficient between personality traits and altruism among young adults. As seen from the table above, there is a significant negative relationship between neuroticism and altruism among young adults ( $r = -.365$ ,  $n = 100$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), therefore, Hypothesis "There will be a significant relationship between neuroticism and altruism among college students" is accepted.

There is a significant relationship between extraversion and altruism among young adults ( $r = .249$ ,  $n = 100$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), therefore, Hypothesis "There will be a significant positive relationship between extraversion and self esteem among college students" is accepted. There is a significant negative relationship between openness and altruism among young adults ( $r = -.216$ ,  $n = 100$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, the Hypothesis "There will be a significant relationship between openness and altruism among college students" is accepted.

From the table 1 no significant relationship has been found between agreeableness and altruism among young adults ( $r = .083$ ,  $n = 100$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), therefore, Hypothesis "There will be a significant relationship between agreeableness and altruism among college students" is rejected. There is a significant positive relationship between conscientiousness and altruism among young adults ( $r = .403$ ,  $n = 100$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Thus, the Hypothesis "There will be a significant relationship between conscientiousness and altruism among college students" is accepted.

## 11. Discussion

The above result has indicated that there is a negative relationship found between neuroticism and altruism with a significance level of .01 which states that a person with high neurotic tendencies would engage less in pro social behavior. Neurotic people are tense and anxious, insecure about themselves hence may feel useless and be unwilling to aid others. "They may be too pessimistic and self-obsessed to be able to regularly offer help to others. In one study it was seen that the personality traits i.e. neuroticism is negatively associated with reciprocal altruism, which is the tendency of an

individual to forgive others (Ashton, Paunonen, Helmes & Jackson, 1998).

There's also a negative relationship found between openness and altruism with a significance level of .05 which states that a person with high altruism would rank low in openness scale. People who rank high in openness are often so self involved in their creative endeavors and thoughts that they don't pay attention to others hence don't showcase altruistic behavior.

A positive relationship was found between extraversion and altruism which shows that a person who is extroverted i.e. socially active and outgoing will show more altruistic behavior. They are optimistic and have a happy-go-lucky outlook on life, hence would want others to be happy too. They are open in their emotional expression and offer aid to friends and strangers alike as they've a desire to engage with others. Similarly, a positive relationship was found between agreeableness and altruism which indicates that a person who scores higher in the agreeableness dimension is more prone to sympathize with others and eager to help them i.e exhibit high altruistic tendencies. Altruism is one of the sub-traits under the agreeableness dimension of personality. A positive relationship was also found between conscientiousness and altruism. People who score high in this trait are morally purposeful and often show high altruistic behavior. They are strong-willed and determined, willing to aid those who may require help. A study conducted by Furnham, Treglown, Hyde and Trickey (2016) revealed that openness, neuroticism is related with altruism. The similar findings have also been revealed by Oda, Machii, Takagi, Kato, Takeda, Kiyonari, Fukukaawa and Hiraishi, 2014.

## 12. Limitations of the study

- The sample size of the study was very small.
- Some other variables could have been taken such as gender differences, individual differences and environmental factors.
- The data collection was entirely based on self-report which may have inflated or deflated the results due to various biases.

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