

## The Relationship between Big Five Personality Traits and Trait Emotional Intelligence in Emerging Adults

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### Abstract

Emerging adults is a transition period where individuals explore different aspects of their life such as love, work and world views and tend to arrive at enduring choices. It is important to understand the psychological factors that underlie this period of transition and self-exploration. Personality of an individual influences how an individual understands his emotional states and that of others which is crucial during self-exploration. Research on emerging adults is limited and has yielded varying results, considering that it is a phase where individuals experience a series of developmental changes or challenges. The present study aims to understand the correlation between trait emotional intelligence and Big Five Personality traits in emerging adults thereby enriching Indian literature. Pearson's correlation was used to understand the relationship between the two variables. Digital media was used to collect a sample of 246 individuals (122 males and 124 females). Results indicated that extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness was positively correlated with trait emotional intelligence and neuroticism was negatively correlated with trait emotional intelligence. Based on the results, training model and interventions can be designed to increase the emotional intelligence of emerging adults and thereby facilitate adaptive coping strategies.

**Key words:** Big Five Personality, trait emotional intelligence, emerging adults

### Introduction

Individuals in the period of emerging adults are not dependent on others unlike children and adolescents; neither do they take on the full responsibilities of adulthood. There is a high degree of demographic diversity and instability in the period of emerging adulthood which reflects in continuous changes and exploration in personal, social and occupational domains, at this stage. They tend to explore their life in the directions of love, work and world views and they gradually arrive at more enduring choices and begin to understand one's own self and that of others (Arnett, 2000). Research on emerging adulthood is limited in terms of understanding the psychological factors that underlie this period of transition and self-exploration. Personality of an individual plays a vital role in influencing and moderating a person's behavior and his or her coping style (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). Identifying, processing and regulating one's emotion may help an individual in selection of appropriate coping strategies (Moradi et al., 2011). Research by Avsec et al. (2009) communicated that Big Five personality traits can be predicted by emotional intelligence. The present study explores the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and trait emotional intelligence in emerging adults. Therefore the results of the present study will enhance the current understanding of the influence of personality traits and trait emotional intelligence in emerging adults and, thereby enriches the existing research literature in the Indian context.

### Method

The research study was conducted with emerging adults of both genders in the age group of 18-25 years. Using non-probability convenience sampling, participants were drawn from college population and included mostly students who were pursuing

professional courses such as arts, science and engineering. A sample of 246 individuals with 122 male and 124 female was used in the study. Data was collected using digital media. Informed consent was sought prior to the individual's participation in the study. Participants of the study were informed that their participation in the study is optional and they can leave at any point during the study.

### Tools used

The Mini International Personality Item Pool Scale (Donnellan et al., 2006) is a 20-item scale which measures the Big Five personality traits- openness to experience, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and neuroticism. It is the short form of the 50 item International Personality Item Pool Five factor Model (IPIP FFM) by Goldberg (1990). The global trait emotional intelligence is measured using 30 item Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire designed by Petrides & Furnham (2006). TEIQue is a shorter form of trait emotional questionnaire designed by Petrides and Furnham, 2001.

### Statistics Used

Pearson correlation was used for this study, to assess the Big Five personality traits in relation to trait emotional intelligence in emerging adults

### Results and Discussion

From the table 1, it is seen that the correlation between neuroticism and trait emotional intelligence revealed an  $r$  value of  $-.36$  which is significant at the  $.01$  level which shows that neuroticism is significantly (negatively) correlated to trait emotional intelligence,  $r(244) = -.36, p < .01$ . The results are consistent with the findings reported by Hjalmarsson and Daderman (2020), Alegre et al. (2019), Yusooff et al. (2014) and James et al. (2012) indicating that neuroticism is negatively correlated to trait emotional intelligence which shows that emotional intelligence

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and neuroticism are polarized constructs. Neuroticism is associated with the experience of negative emotions and associated behaviors. However emotional intelligence is concerned with understanding, managing one's own emotions and the effective use of emotion in solving problems and

developmental changes or challenges. Therefore this study will help in understanding the psychological variables that play a role during this period, and will enrich the literature in Indian context.

Previous studies have noted that emotional intelligence influences mental health through a

Table 1 shows Pearson's Coefficient of Correlation between Big Five personality traits and trait emotional intelligence

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Extraversion	—	-.12	.02	.22**	.01	.25**
2. Neuroticism		—	.04	-.02	-.11	-.36**
3. Openness to experience			—	.11	.20**	.27**
4. Agreeableness				—	.08	.17**
5. Conscientiousness					—	.32**
6. Trait emotional intelligence						—

\*\*p< .01

making decisions. It is evident that emotional intelligence and neuroticism are contrary to each other which substantiate the current findings. It is also observed from the table that extraversion [ $r(244) = .25, p < .01$ ], openness to experience [ $r(244) = .27, p < .01$ ], agreeableness [ $r(244) = .17, p < .01$ ], conscientiousness [ $r(244) = .32, p < .01$ ] are significantly (positively) correlated to trait emotional intelligence and are also significant at the .01 level. The positive correlation between trait emotional intelligence and extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness is supported by the findings reported by Indradevi (2015). It can be argued that emotional intelligence and personality are correlated and affect each other. The content analysis of trait emotional intelligence by Petrides et al. (2016) yielded factors such as sociability, emotionality, empathy, which are reflected in the items of Mini IPIP states. Thus different aspects of emotional intelligence and personality traits are associated. The results of the current study are substantiated by evidence that emotional intelligence is strongest predictor of four of the Big Five personality traits- agreeableness, openness to experience, extraversion and neuroticism (Athota et al., 2009).

### Conclusions

Extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness was positively correlated with trait emotional intelligence and neuroticism was negatively correlated with trait emotional intelligence.

### Implications

There has been a lack of research in emerging adults examining personality traits and trait emotional intelligence. The current study will address this gap to enrich the current understanding of the variables. Research on emerging adults is limited and has yielded varying results, considering that it is a phase where individuals experience a series of

selection of coping strategies. Training model of emotional intelligence personalized according to the predominant personality traits of the individual can be designed to equip the individual to use more adaptive coping strategies.

### Limitations

- The study included a sample of 246 individuals which was collected using convenience sampling. Therefore, the generalizability of results to the population at large must be interpreted with caution.

### Suggestions for further research

- The study could include other demographic variables such as socio-economic status and examine the impact of these variables on the study.
- The research can be conducted with a larger sample using probability sampling methods which will improve the applicability of results.
- The results of the study can promote further intervention-oriented research focusing on techniques to improve trait emotional intelligence and coping styles.

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