

A Study of Rumination of University Students in Relation to Personality

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Abstract

The present research was undertaken with an objective to study rumination of university students in relation to extraversion and emotional stability dimensions of personality across genders. Descriptive method of research was followed on the sample of 80 university students. To assess the personality short version of Eysenck's Maudsley Personality Inventory (EMPI) was used, while ruminative behavior was assessed through Mihaly Rumination Scale. The means, SDs along with t- values computed to explain gender differentials in rumination and personality of university students and chi-square was applied to find out the significance of association between rumination and dimensions of personality of university students. The results revealed that there was no significant gender differential in rumination and extraversion and emotional stability dimensions of personality. The university students across gender groups have shown themselves to be more on the flow side of rumination and students tend to be extroverts and exhibit emotional stability. There was no significant association between rumination and extraversion among university students. A significant association between rumination and emotional stability dimension of personality was found depicting highly emotional stable university students to be more towards flow side of rumination as compared to emotionally instable counterparts among university students.

Keywords: *Rumination, extraversion, emotional stability, personality*

Introduction

In the crisis of COVID-19, people have suffered high levels of stress and mental health problems. To cope with the widespread suffering of all kinds -- physical; psychological; social; and economical-- the positive psychology of personal happiness is the sole approach to examine personal wellbeing. In 93% of countries worldwide, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted or halted critical mental health services, thus creating the demand for mental health (WHO survey, 10 September 2020). Issues like

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bereavement, isolation, loss of income, and fear are triggering mental health conditions across the globe to everyone. Thus, the pandemic is increasing the demand for mental health services. The promotion of mental health and well-being as health priorities has been taken within the global sustainable development agenda adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015.

Specifically, goal 3 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages. It was decided that one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being to be achieved by 2030 (Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development).

In the existing global crisis of economic slowdown and hence, socio-emotional problems of large masses, education is the only instrument to meet the growing demand for trained manpower which can readily and continuously acquire newer skills to encounter these challenges. The task of the higher education institutions is not only to impart knowledge to young people, rather the social development of an individual which includes positive mental health, well-being, coping strategies, optimistic way of thinking, positive inter and intra personal relationships, high self-esteem, creative and critical mind set, scientific temper etc. In other words, the role of education—especially higher education in man-making process—is shaping of personality. Higher education institutions must give opportunities to learners to create their own knowledge and develop adequate life skills so that they can build their personality more as an emotional stable person with pro-social orientation to contribute maximum to the national development.

Personality is the dynamic organisation within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his characteristics, behaviour, and thought (Allport,1961). Personality is the intricacy of its structures and its pervasive influences on the “quality of individual’s total behaviour”. The scientific concept of personality in modern times stresses the motivational as well as the behavioural aspects of personality, which emphasises not only how the individual appears to others, but what he actually is and why he is as he is—the worldly manifestation of inner potentialities. In a similar way, rumination is a stable behaviour marked by repetitive, recurrent, intrusive, and uncontrollable thinking by a person which has been linked to worry, anxiety, and depression aspects of human life (Nolen-Hoeksema, S., 2000). Typically, it is examined in the clinical domain, although research suggests the propensity for this behaviour is an individual difference linked to personality. To date, rumination has predominantly been investigated in its relation to neuroticism, but a more comprehensive measure of personality would help to clarify rumination’s place in the psychological space. A habit

of rumination can be dangerous to one's mental health as it can prolong or intensify depression as well as impair one's ability to think and process emotions.

The concepts of personality and rumination have been an area of interest to psychologists and educationists all over the world. The review of studies reveals that the different dimensions of personality traits were affected by rumination (Carter, 2009; Bahrami, 2012; and Baer and Sauer, 2011) and mental health (Srivastva, 2005; Downey et al. 2014) as well. The tendency to ruminate was significantly related to negative emotionality and neuroticism (Brinker et al. 2014). There was a strongest evidence found that the personality traits such as introversion and emotional stability do not affect the creative students, whereas significant relationships were found in neuroticism (rumination) and psychological health of students (Chen and Lie 2015). A less structured personality appears to be associated with more borderline and depressive symptoms, thus higher proneness to rumination (Kovacs et al. 2021).

Thus, the review of the above mentioned research indicates that there is a further requirement of investigation to understand the relationship of rumination with personality traits of university students. Moreover, it is a vital area of human development and calls for further exploration in new conditions because of the covid19 pandemic. Hence, the need was felt to focus levels of rumination in terms of the personality dimensions of extraversion and emotional stability among university students.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To study rumination and personality of university students in terms of (i) extraversion and (ii) emotional stability.
2. To study gender difference in rumination and personality of university students.
3. To study rumination in relation to extraversion and emotional stability dimensions of personality of university students.

Hypothesis

1. There will be no significant gender difference in rumination of university students.
2. There will be no significant gender difference in personality dimensions of extraversion and emotional stability of university students.
3. There will be no significant association of rumination in extraversion and emotional stability dimensions of personality of university students.

Operational Definitions

1. Rumination

Rumination—as opposite to ideational flow—refers to symptoms in human behaviour that indicate depressive and anxiety symptoms along with leading a person to believe that he/she is guilty and must be ashamed. A process of continuously thinking about the same thoughts, which tend to be sad or dark. It is pondering over and meditating over the past occurrences that may act as a block to proceed further in life trajectories. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1976) proposed the concept of ‘flow’ as deep involvement in positive activity and thought the joy one gets in the recollection of good and positive experiences or in activities demanding high involvement. Flow exists in the present, and it is possible to flow while engaged in any activity.

2. Personality

Eysenck’s personality—with three dimensions, namely, extraversion, emotional stability, and psychoticism—revolves around two dimensional approach in which emotional stability refers to withstanding a difficult situations, handle adversity and remain productive and capable thought whereas extraversion refers to the general tendency to experience positive emotions, as well as by the traits much as sociable, lively and active.

3. Gender Difference

Gendered behaviour is best understood by social roles--going beyond the definition of biological gender—where male and female individuals from childhood to old age show behaviour patterns distinctive to the two gender groups. In the present study, it refers to gender differences in personality and rumination among university students.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive method of research was followed in the conduct of the present study

Tools: i) Eysenck’s Maudsley Personality Inventory (MPI) is a self-report instrument designed to measure extraversion and neuroticism (emotional stability) —is comprised of 48 Yes/No items that yield total scores for extraversion and neuroticism. The total composite neuroticism or extraversion score is simply the sum of raw scores on all 24 items in the two dimensions in its contribution to total personality stability because the raw score means and standard deviation are approximately equal for each dimension. In case of the short version, the scores obtained may range from 0-12 with a high score indicating ‘extraversion’ and ‘emotional instability’.

ii.) Mihaly Rumination Scale which deals with emotions, contains seven items. Three items are pairs; the respondent is required to choose one item in each pair. The others contain statements which the respondent is required to rate on a 5-scale, indicating the frequency of occurrence.

Sample

A sample of 80 postgraduate students of Punjabi University, Patiala was selected for the conducted of study.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Descriptive statistics was used to explain the personality and ruminations of university students. The means, SD along with t-test were used to study and compare the personality profile of university students in terms of gender. The chi-square was applied to find out the significance of association between dimensions of personality, i.e., extraversion and emotional stability and rumination among university students. The students were identified into low and high groups on extraversion, emotional stability, and rumination on the basis of Q_1 and Q_3 scores of the respective variables.

Analysis and Interpretation of the Data

The results were prepared and interpreted by application of t-test and chi-square for testing of hypotheses.

1. Gender Difference in Rumination and Personality

The means and standard deviation of male and female university students on rumination and extraversion and emotional stability dimensions of personality along with t-values are given in Table 1.

Table 1

Means and standard deviations of Rumination and Extraversion and Emotional stability scores on Personality of male and female university students along with t-values

S. No.	Variable		Gender		t-value
			Male (N=40)	Female (N=40)	
1.	Rumination	Mean	13.96	14.10	0.44
		SD	2.16	1.90	
2.	Extraversion	Mean	5.05	5.37	0.68
		SD	2.00	2.16	
	Emotional Stability	Mean	7.30	7.00	0.94
		SD	1.72	1.10	

Note: None of the t-values is significant at 0.05 level.

It may be observed from the table 1 that the mean rumination score of male university students was 13.90 as compared to 14.10 of female university students. Furthermore, the t-value testing, the significance of mean difference came out to be 0.44, which is not significant at 0.05 level. Hence, the hypothesis “*there will be no significant gender difference in rumination of university students*” is accepted. Thus, it may be stated that there is no significant gender difference in rumination of university students and being low on rumination—to be designated as flow abundant.

The table 1 shows that mean extraversion scores of male and female university students came out to be 5.05 and 5.37, respectively. The t-value testing the significance of mean difference came out to be 0.68. It is not significant at 0.05 level. Furthermore, the mean emotional stability scores of male and female university students came out to be 7.30 and 7.00, respectively. The t-value testing the significance of mean difference came out to be 0.94, not significant at 0.05 level. Thus, the hypothesis, “*there will be no significant gender difference in the personality of university students on the dimensions of extraversion and emotional stability*” is accepted. The results are suggestive of the fact that the male and female university students do not show any significant difference in their personality in terms of extraversion and emotional stability—being towards extraversion on one side and emotionally stable on the other.

2. Rumination in Relation to extraversion and emotional stability dimensions of Personality

The categorisation of university students on both variables, i.e., personality (separately for extraversion and emotional stability) and rumination was prepared in a 2*2 contingency table with high and low levels and chi-square was applied. The results are given in table 2.

Table 2
Rumination vs. Personality (Extraversion and Emotional Stability): Crosstab and Chi-square

Personality	Levels	Rumination			Chi-square
		Low	High	Total	
Extraversion	High	12 (70.59%)	10 (71.43%)	22 (70.97%)	0.12
	Low	5 (29.41%)	4 (28.57%)	9 (29.03%)	
	Total	17 (54.84%)	14 (45.16%)	31	
	High	12 (70.59%)	5 (35.71%)	17 (54.84%)	

Emotional Stability	Low	5 (29.41%)	9 (64.29%)	14 (45.16%)	5.31*
	Total	17 (54.84%)	14 (45.16%)	31	

*p<0.05

The chi-square value testing the significance of the association between rumination and extraversion among university students turned out to be 0.12 which is not significant at 0.05 level of significance. This shows that there is no significant association between rumination and extraversion among university students.

The table 2 further shows that the chi-square testing the significance of association between rumination and emotional stability among university students turned out to be 5.31, which is significant at 0.05 level of significance thereby indicating that there is significant association between rumination and emotional stability among university students.

On the basis of these results, the hypothesis, “*there will be no significant association between rumination and extraversion and emotional stability dimensions of personality of university students*” is partially accepted. This is indicative of the fact that university students in low rumination i.e., more in flow state, are highly emotional stable whereas being high on rumination makes them emotionally unstable. On the other hand, emotionally unstable university students have a tendency to be ruminators.

Conclusion and Educational Implications

The university students have shown themselves to be extrovert on one side and emotionally stable on the other side of personality along with being low on rumination—nee flow abundance. There was no significant gender differential in rumination and extraversion and emotional stability dimensions of personality. The university students across gender groups have shown themselves to be more on the flow side of rumination. There was no significant association between rumination and extraversion among university students. Thus, rumination may be seen as independent of extraversion among university students. A significant association between rumination and emotional stability dimension of personality was found depicting highly emotional stable university students to be more flow side of rumination as compared to low emotionally stable counterparts among university students.

There is endless opportunity in higher education institutions to develop personality through various co-curricular and life skills activities that should be made an integral part of the teaching learning process. There is a need to resolve the issues of emotional

unstability among learners to enhance their learning in and out of formal education set up, especially in higher education. It calls for reducing pessimistic rumination and promotion of flow in ideation for construction of knowledge.

The focus of the present study was delimited to only campus based university students of Punjabi University, Patiala, and to science and social science courses. Thus, it is also suggested to further study rumination in relation to personality among university students, at graduate and post-graduate level in a comparative perspective and to gauge the big effect of covid-19 pandemic on educational institutions made and emergence of online mode on the traditional mode of teaching-learning. Researches should focus on learners' personality traits in different kinds of educational programmes offline vs. on-line along with other socio-psychological variables for enabling them to socially and economically better productive members of the society.

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