

Evaluation of the Effects of Gender Differences on Personality Traits and Life Satisfaction

Azam Golabdar, Kazem Rasoolzadeh Tabatabaie, Maryam Esmailinasab

Department of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran

Abstract

Aim: This was a causal-comparative study aimed to comparatively evaluate the personality characteristics and life satisfaction among the individuals resident of district 6 Tehran, Iran. **Method:** The research population consisted of 661 individuals (≥ 20 -year-old; 49.5% male and 51.5% female) selected through stratified random sampling method in five different age groups. The data were collected using researcher-made demographic questionnaire, NEO Five-Factor Inventory short form, and satisfaction with life scale (Diener *et al.*). The data were analyzed with independent t-test. **Result and Discussion:** Results of independent t-test indicated that the 20-30 years old women received significantly higher scores in neuroticism and agreeableness features than men and between men and women were not observed a significant difference in extroversion, openness to experience, and conscientiousness in different age groups. In addition, the life satisfaction score of the 20-30 years old age group of women was significantly higher than men, other personality characteristics in relation to life satisfaction were not significantly different. **Conclusion:** The status of neuroticism, agreeableness, and life satisfaction in 20-30 years old women were discussed. Further conducting studies on the psychological characters of young age groups of women is necessary.

Key words: Gender differences, life satisfaction, personality characteristics

INTRODUCTION

Personality is a psychological concept, used to describe and explain consistent patterns of emotion, cognition, attitudes, and behaviors.^[1] This concept can also be regarded as a more or less stable structure of features, moods, thoughts and even physical characteristics, which are unique for every person.^[2]

There is consensus among researchers regarding the determination of the factors of personality, which include six major traits,^[3] such as neuroticism, extroversion, openness, conscientiousness, and agreeableness.^[4]

In neuroticism trait, relatively stable tendency is observed toward maladaptive behavior and reaction toward anxiety and negative feelings.^[5]

On the other hand, extraversion factor is associated with traits, such as being sociable, fun and kind.^[6] In other words, high levels of extraversion are related to being active, optimist, brave, and sociable.^[7]

The openness factor is indicative of being open to critics and new approaches and experiences. These people are highly open, clever, creative, imaginative, and flexible and are eager to learn and experience new discoveries.^[4]

The agreeableness factor refers to a kind of friendship, appreciation, consent and kindness.^[8] On the other hand, the conscientiousness factor is a dimension of individual differences in organization and development, which is related to conscientiousness, self-discipline, ambition, and hard work. High conscientious people are less distracted and more stable, think more, are well organized and eager to progress.^[9]

The personality of each person is affected by various factors, among which biological (e.g., age and gender) and

Address for correspondence:

Kazem Rasoolzadeh Tabatabaie, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran.
E-mail: Rasoolza@modares.ac.ir

Received: 17-09-2016

Revised: 02-12-2016

Accepted: 15-12-2016

social (e.g., family and culture) factors are of significant importance.

On the other hand, these personality traits have an impact on all mental and physical aspects of an individual in a way that many components, including health,^[10,11] creativity,^[12] drug use,^[13] and life satisfaction^[14,15] could be predicted by these characteristics.

Life satisfaction, as one of the most influential components, is welfare and health indicator, indicating a general feeling of mental and physical health and associated with increased longevity.^[16] In other words, life satisfaction is the most comprehensive assessment of an individual's living condition.^[17]

In terms of factors affecting life satisfaction, Heller *et al.* introduced two top-bottom and bottom-top approaches. In the bottom-top approach, external events, situational factors, and demographics are emphasized, whereas there is more attention toward internal variables and processes in the top-bottom approach.^[18]

According to Lissitsa and Chachashvili-Bolotin, the main predictors of life satisfaction were reported to be health, occupational status, educational level, marital status, income, race, and religion. Moreover, a relationship was confirmed between life satisfaction and the variables of self-concept, self-esteem, and social support.^[19-21]

Many researchers have studied the pattern of gender differences in the components of life satisfaction and personality traits. However, conflicting results have been obtained in this regard. In a study by Dehshiri and Moosavi (2014), life satisfaction was significantly higher in the female subjects, compared to the male participants.^[22]

In addition, results obtained by Matud *et al.* revealed that women with greater social support had higher life satisfactions, compared to men. Meanwhile, life satisfaction was reported to be higher in male elderlies in a study, compared to the female subjects in the mentioned research.^[21,23] According to the results of some of the studies, no significant difference was observed between the male and female participants regarding life satisfaction.^[24,25]

In terms of personality traits and gender differences, Vianello *et al.* reported higher levels of neuroticism and agreeableness in women and extraversion and openness in men.^[26]

In another study, a significant difference was observed between the scores of male and female students regarding openness and agreeableness factors.^[27] A study was conducted on a group of elderlies, results of which revealed high levels of neuroticism and agreeableness in elderly women, compared to men.^[28] In contrast, Abedi *et al.* pointed out greater openness scores among female students compared to the male counterparts.^[29]

Given the diverse results of the current research and tremendous impact of personality and life satisfaction on all individual and social aspects of life, and with regard to increased knowledge and awareness toward these factors, which could affect the quality of interactions, treatment results, and policy-makings, the importance of research in this area is revealed.

These studies help organizations and institutes to plan the most efficient programs. Using the findings of these studies, officials, and policy-makers are able to have a better performance based on the characteristics of each gender, age group, and their proper needs. This eventually leads to increased life satisfaction in the community.

In addition, despite the various studies conducted in the area of personality traits and life satisfaction, few studies have evaluated the gender factor as a main variable.

On the other hand, the majority of studies assess a specific group (e.g., students and elderlies), which involves a certain age group. In the present study, a large sample population is involved with different age groups (separated by gender), which are simultaneously evaluated by controlling the ratio of level of education in the society. This has led to more accurate results and development of fundamental research.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This causal-comparative research was conducted to determine the effects of gender differences on personality traits and life satisfaction in different age groups (>20-year-old). All residents of the district 6 of Tehran were selected as the sample population and divided into five age groups based on the theory of psychosocial development by Villant.

The sample size was estimated at 661 cases based on data from Statistical Center of Iran and with respect to the relative frequency distribution of the community. In this study, the first to fourth groups included the age groups of 20-30, 30-40, 40-50, and 50-65 years old, respectively ($n = 182$, $n_2 = 126$, $n_3 = 122$ and $n_4 = 141$). The fifth group consisted of people aged >65-year-old ($n = 90$). In addition, stratified random sampling method was used due to the age of the subjects and the ratio of their age in society, educational levels of each age group after confirming the participation of the subjects. Data collection was carried out using a demographic questionnaire, NEO-Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), and satisfaction with life scale (SWLS; Diener *et al.*, 2000).^[17]

NEO-FFI short form, NEO-FFI-60, was used in this study to gather information and evaluate the five major personality dimensions.

This scale was first designed by McCrae and Costa and contains 60 items, each scored within the range of 0-4. Each

question is indicative of a major personality trait, N factor for neuroticism, E for extraversion, O for openness, A for agreeableness, and C for conscientiousness. There are 12 items assigned for each factor, and each subject could achieve a total score of 0-40.

In terms of NEO-FFI reliability, several studies have shown good internal consistency between its subscales. In this regard, Mooradian and Nezlek revealed the reliability of neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness at the Cronbach's alpha of 0.84, 0.75, 0.74, 0.75, and 0.83, respectively.^[30]

This questionnaire has been validated in Iran and its reliability in 208 students has been reported to be 0.83, 0.75, 0.80, 0.79, and 0.79 for the N, E, O, A, and C factors, respectively.^[31] There were also some reports on the reliability of NEO-FFI factors.

According to McCrae and Costa (1989), the short NEO form is the exact match of the complete NEO-PI questionnaire; in this regard, there was a >0.68 correlation between the scales of the short form and complete questionnaire. In addition, the reliability of this questionnaire was estimated at the Cronbach's alpha of 0.5-0.8 in the present study.^[32]

SWLS questionnaire by Diener: A short five-item instrument by Diener *et al.*, (1985), designed to measure global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life. Each item has seven subscales, scores based on the Likert scale from one to seven (completely agree to completely disagree).^[17]

The previous studies have confirmed the reliability and validity of this questionnaire; in this regard, reliability of this questionnaire was estimated at 0.90, 0.82, 0.78, 0.76, and 0.61 in America, Germany, Japan, Mexico, and China, respectively,^[33] with internal consistency of 0.85 and test-retest reliability of 0.77.^[34] Moreover, its construct validity was calculated at 0.42 by Savari.^[35] It is noteworthy that the validity of this questionnaire was estimated at the Cronbach's alpha of 0.84 in the present study.

Before data collection and conduction of the research, our researcher referred to the selected area and explained the objectives of the study to the participants.

To do so, the number of items in the questionnaire, method used to respond to the questions and possible time needed were determined for the subjects. Those who were willing to participate in the study received NEO and SWLS questionnaires and any ambiguities during the completion of forms were cleared.

At the end of this process, gifts were provided for the subjects to adhere to research ethics. Data analysis was performed with SPSS using descriptive statistics (central and dispersion parameters) and independent *t*-test due to the nature of the

study and use of several independent groups with distance variables.

RESULTS

In this study, the descriptive indicators of five major personality traits and the component of life satisfaction were evaluated based on the five age groups in the study, differentiated by gender [Table 1]. Afterward, the level of significance of each age group was determined using independent *t*-test. However, only the tables related to those personality traits that revealed a significant difference between the genders are provided here due to the great number of tables [Tables 2-5]. In addition, the assumption of homogeneity of variance in different age groups was assessed using Levin test. The diagram of mean of these personality traits and life satisfaction in two genders are illustrated [Figures 1 and 2].

As observed in Table 1, mean scores of male participants was higher in the E and O subscales, whereas mean scores of female subjects were higher in the N, A, and C subscales.

The results of the independent *t*-test revealed that the agreeableness feature was higher in women aged 20-30 years, compared to men, which was indicative of a significant difference in this regard ($P < 0.05$). According to the Table 2, the assumption of homogeneity of variance has not been met in the age group of 65-50 years, for which, the nonparametric test of Mann-Whitney *U* was applied [Table 3].

As observed in Table 3, Mann-Whitney *U* revealed no significant results in terms of the agreeableness variable in the age group of 50-65 years.

In terms of neuroticism personality trait, homogeneity of variances was observed in all age groups, and independent *t*-test revealed significant results in women aged 20-30 years ($P < 0.05$) [Table 4].

Table 1: Descriptive indicators of research variables differentiated by gender

Scales	Mean±Standard deviation		
	Gender		
	Male	Female	Total
NEO			
N	21.25±6.52	22.28±6.75	21.78±6.66
E	29.75±5.55	29.26±6.29	29.50±5.94
O	24.01±4.63	23.91±5.26	23.95±4.96
A	30.71±5.31	32.35±5.82	31.55±5.63
C	34.68±6.77	35.47±6	35.09±6.39
SWLS score	22.14±6.58	22.83±6.48	22.49±6.53

SWLS: Satisfaction with life scale

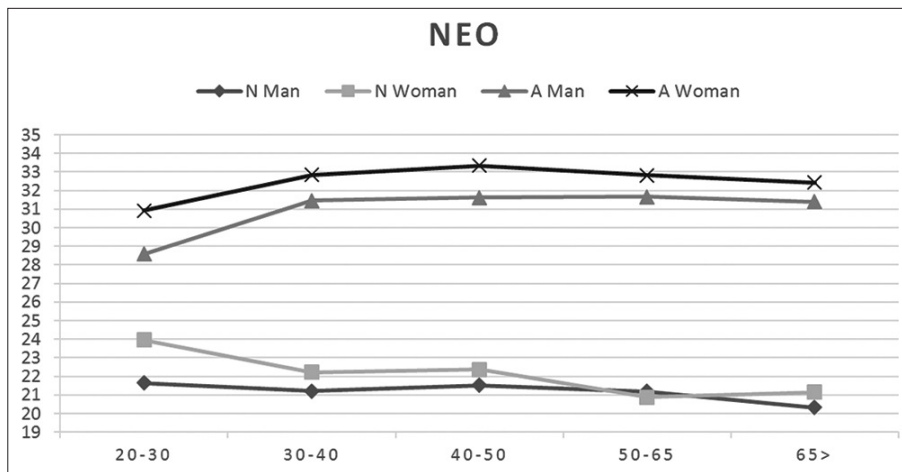


Figure 1: Mean personality traits of neuroticism and agreeableness based on gender differentiation

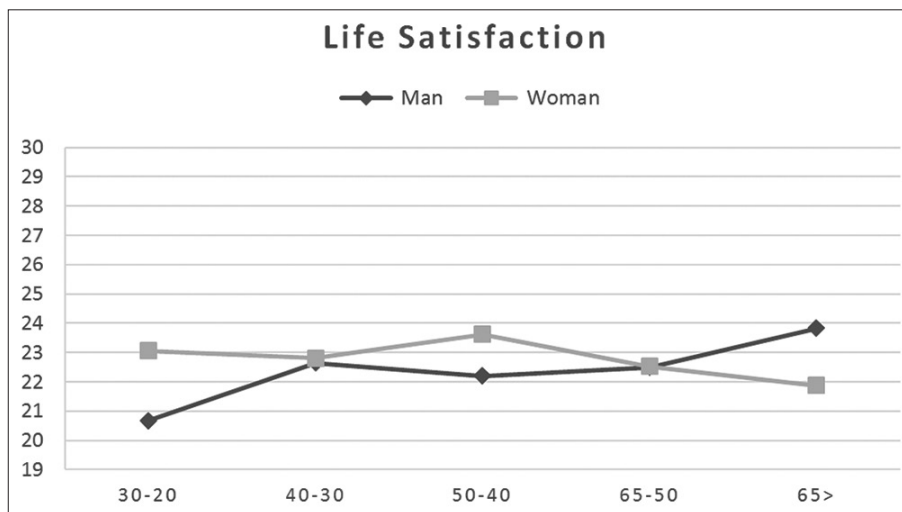


Figure 2: Mean life satisfaction based on the satisfaction with life scale test, differentiated by age and gender

Table 2: Results of independent *t*-test regarding the variable of agreeableness

Age (years)	Statistical indicator				
	Levin <i>F</i>	Level of significance	<i>t</i>	Degree of freedom	Level of significance
20-30	3.544	0.061	-2.889	181	0.004
30-40	0.675	0.413	-1.542	124	0.126
40-50	0.533	0.467	-1.679	120	0.096
50-60	5.67	0.019	-1.282	139	0.202
Age>65	1.881	0.174	-0.818	88	0.416

Table 3: Results of the Mann–Whitney *U* regarding the variable of agreeableness

Age (years)	Statistical indicator		
	Mann–Whitney <i>U</i>	<i>Z</i>	Level of significance
50-65 years	2140	-1.42	0.156

As observed in the Table 5, homogeneity of variances was observed in all age groups and independent *t*-test was

significant for life satisfaction in women aged 20-30 years ($P < 0.05$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to the results of the present study, the features of neuroticism and agreeableness are significantly different in men and women. In this regard, neuroticism and agreeableness were more observed in women aged

Table 4: Results of independent *t*-test related to neuroticism

Age (years)	Descriptive indicator				
	Levin <i>F</i>	Level of significance	<i>t</i>	Degree of freedom	Level of significance
20-30	0.861	0.355	-2.471	181	0.014
30-40	1.848	0.176	-0.777	124	0.439
40-50	0.707	0.402	-0.646	120	0.520
50-60	0.0001	0.995	0.310	139	0.757
Age>65	1.060	0.306	-0.631	88	0.529

Table 5: Results of the independent *t*-test related to life satisfaction SWLS test

Age (years)	Statistical indicator				
	Levin <i>F</i>	Level of significance	<i>t</i>	Degree of freedom	Level of significance
20-30	0.115	0.735	-2.409	181	0.017
30-40	0.023	0.880	-0.147	124	0.883
40-50	0.022	0.882	-1.162	120	0.247
50-65	0.977	0.325	-0.019	139	0.985
Age>65	0.301	0.585	1.408	88	0.163

SWLS: Satisfaction with life scale

20-30 years, compared to men at the same age. In addition, results of the SWLS questionnaire and independent *t*-test revealed a significant difference in the evaluated women and men (aged 20-30 years) regarding life satisfaction. In general, life satisfaction was more observed in women aged 20-30 years, compared to men at the same age. However, no statistically significant difference was observed in the other age groups.

In terms of personality traits, our findings are in line with the results obtained by Chapman *et al.*, 2007, Blonigen *et al.*, and Schmitt *et al.*^[28,36,37]

In the mentioned study, higher levels of neuroticism and agreeableness were observed in women, compared to men. These findings are also in congruence with the results obtained by Vianello *et al.* and Rahmani and Lavasani.^[26,27]

High levels of agreeableness in women within the age range of 20-30 years could be explained by social psychology theories. According to this theory, gender differences are influenced by compatibility with social roles, which determines the proper behavior of men and women in the society. These roles are in fact the expectations of the community from both genders regarding social characteristics and behaviors. In this regard, the community expects women to be more agreeable and pleasant compared to men. However, this expectation is so high that lack of the presence of such characteristics in a woman is considered unconventional.^[38]

In other words, men are mainly associated with dominance, aggression, and opposition, whereas women are known by their ability to compromise. This type of behavior, which is

more likely to be observed in women aged 20-30 years, is mainly formed by cultural issues.^[39] Similar to these results, Allemann and Lehmann also indicated the establishment of character traits using social roles.^[40]

According to the biological and evolutionary theories, women invest more in their child's growth, compared to men, due to biological reasons, such as pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding. Therefore, women guarantee the survival of children with better confidence compared to men.^[41] This type of investment causes women to be more agreeable than men.

It should be mentioned that challenges men, within the age range of 20-30 years, are faced with make this period more stressful. Stressful challenges, including suitable job, financial independence, housing, and finding a person to share life with, are more observed in the life of men since these concepts are more expected to be covered by men. Therefore, men have lower agreeableness scores. In other words, women aged 20-30 years had higher agreeableness scores compared to men within the same age range.

In a study by Nolen-Hoeksema, it was demonstrated that women had higher scores of negative emotions compared to men. This high score could be justified by many reports about sexual harassment and feeling of pressure due to social restrictions in women.^[42] Moreover, women are generally more vulnerable, compared to men, due to the use of emotional coping and avoidance styles.^[43] Furthermore, the highlighted feature of sensitivity in women, compared to men, has been evaluated and confirmed in several studies, which could determine the higher level of neuroticism in women, compared to men.

According to Erikson theory, the young population should resolve the conflict between intimacy and isolation. By doing so, independence and intimacy could be balanced when there is a close relationship with a spouse. Otherwise, couples will be faced with negative outcomes leading to depression and loneliness. Similarly, Barak (2013) marked that the feeling of loneliness reaches its peak within the age range of 20-30 years and then decreases by aging.

Today, increased marriage age has turned into a social concern due to the fact that aging could be associated with difficulties in finding a partner with similar personalities. Even married women are required to raise their children and meet the needs of the family members, and there will be no adequate time for occupation and financial independence. Higher score of neuroticism in women could be justified by the mentioned information.

In terms of life satisfaction, our findings revealed that life satisfaction was significantly higher in women aged 20-30 years compared to men within the same age range. However, no statistically significant difference was observed in other age groups. These findings are in congruence with the results obtained by Dehshiri and Moosavi (2015).^[22] In addition, our results are in line with a number of studies (such as Ghahraman, 2011; Gholizadeh *et al.*, 2009) due to lack of significant difference between women and men in various age groups, with the exception of the age range of 20-30 years.^[24,25]

In many countries, parent's responsibilities regarding their children significantly decreases when their child reaches the age of 18. In contrast, a parent is responsible for financial support of education and marriage of his children in Iran due to the current culture of our community. Therefore, Iranian parents (especially fathers) are under a lot of financial pressure. This issue is more prominent in young women due to the cultural and religious condition of the society.

Results related to personality traits revealed that the feature of agreeableness was more observed in women within the age range of 20-30 years, compared to men at the same age. On the other hand, a positive relationship was observed between the agreeableness trait and life satisfaction in many studies (including Magee *et al.*, 2013).^[44] Therefore, it could be concluded that women within the age range of 20-30 years have higher levels of agreeableness and life satisfaction compared to men at the same age.

In total, our findings were indicative of a significant difference between men and women within the age range of 20-30 years in terms of the personality traits of neuroticism and agreeableness. These results could be used by researchers to design intervention programs as needed and aid the policy-makers provide strategic plans in this area, which eventually leads to increased quality and quality of life and life satisfaction in Iranian population. One of the limitations

of the present study was the use of NEO-short form instead of the long form due to lack of accurate completion of the form by the participants. Therefore, it is suggested that the original version of questionnaire be used in future studies for more accuracy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Hereby, we extend our gratitude to all the participants and authorities for their cooperation in this research.

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Source of Support: Nil. **Conflict of Interest:** None declared.