

# Personality Profile and Suicidal Behaviour among College Students

<sup>1</sup>W. Rebecca Devi, <sup>2</sup>Dr. Jai Prakash

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Dept. of Clinical Psychology, RIMS, Imphal -795004, Manipur

<sup>2</sup>Additional Professor, Dept. of Clinical Psychology, RINPAS, Ranchi, India

---

**Abstract:** The World Health Organization recognizes suicide as one of the world's leading causes of death worldwide. Research into personality traits related to suicidality suggests substantial variability among suicidal behaviour. A potentially useful approach that accounts for this complexity is to identify the personality traits and other key contributing risk factors. This study aims at investigating the relationship between personality traits and suicidal ideation among college students. The surveying approach under the descriptive method is adopted in the current investigation. 100 undergraduate students participated the study and completed NEO-Five Personality Inventory – Revised, Adult Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire. Results revealed that 11(11%) participants had suicidal ideation within the past one month. The study also revealed that high neuroticism; low extraversion and low conscientiousness have positive relation with suicidal ideation. Further, they study also revealed that openness to experience and agreeableness have insignificant relation with suicidal ideation. The study highlighted that personality traits/ individual differences are key contributing factor to suicidal ideation.

**Keywords:** personality traits; neuroticism; extraversion; openness to experience, agreeableness; conscientiousness; suicidal ideation.

---

## I. INTRODUCTION

Personality concerns the most important, most noticeable parts of an individual's psychological life. Over the last 3 decades, interest in the contribution of personality trait profiles to complex behavioral phenomena such as suicidal behavior has increased <sup>[1,2]</sup>. In terms of "normal" personality, personality traits associated with suicidality include a positive association with neuroticism (especially its depressive and anxious facets) and a negative association with extraversion (especially its Assertiveness and Positive emotions facets) <sup>[3-5]</sup>. Suicide is not an isolated event; it is a sequence of process starting from death wishes, suicidal ideation, suicidal contemplation, suicide attempt, and finally, suicide completion<sup>[6,7]</sup>. Suicidal behaviors may result from reciprocal interactions between maladaptive cognitions, affect, and behavior, occurring subsequently to an environmental/internal precipitant <sup>[8,9]</sup>.

Suicide accounts for almost 2% of the world's death. Suicide has emerged as one of the leading causes of death among individuals aged 15–34 years in all countries which provided information on suicidality to the World Health Organization <sup>[10]</sup>. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among 15-24 years old and suicide is second leading cause of death among youth attending colleges <sup>[11,12]</sup>. In India, youths (15-29 years) were the prime groups taking recourse to the path of suicides. Around 34.6% suicide victims were youths in the age group of 15-29 years and 78.8% of students who had committed suicides were in the age group 15-29 years<sup>[13]</sup>. Investigating antecedents and correlates of suicidal behaviour is thus important in tackling this disturbing trend of youth suicide.

College life can be an impersonal and seemingly overwhelming milieu for even the healthiest of students; but for some students also burdened with mental illness, these developmental storms may be impossible to weather. College is the transition to adulthood; are a time of infinite possibilities and it takes extensive amount of adjustment with increased

academic and social pressures. Suicidal behaviour among college students may have a unique aetiology because developmental transitions that occur in college and young adulthood, including changes in family relationships, peer contexts, and increased opportunity for alcohol and drug use. Suicide and suicidal behaviours among college students directly and profoundly affect college campuses, surrounding neighbourhoods, and the individuals who study, work, and live in these communities. Working with suicidal youths can be incredibly rewarding; but losing a young adult to suicide is a tragedy. Efforts should be directed towards basic and clinical research, psycho-education, mentoring, and community outreach programme based on suicide prevention strategies. The goal of the study was to assess the personality traits and suicidal behavior among college students and to explore the relationship between Personality trait profile and Suicidal behavior among college students.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The surveying approach under the descriptive method was adopted. 100(76 females and 24 males) undergraduate students within the age range of 18-26years were selected randomly from 3 different colleges of Imphal-west district of Manipur through multistage sampling method and informed consent was taken from the participants. General Health Questionnaire-12<sup>[14]</sup> was utilized to screen out psychological distress among the participants. Semi structured and self-prepared performa was administered to collect information about the socio-demographic variables. Besides, interview was also conducted, wherever necessary. The revised NEO Personality Inventory <sup>[15]</sup> is a 240-item questionnaire to be answered on a 5-point scale designed to operationalize the five-factor model of personality was also administered. The Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E), Openness to Experience (O), Agreeableness (A), and Conscientiousness (C) factors are comprised of six subscales which measure specific traits. Adult Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire (ASIQ) <sup>[16]</sup> consists of 25 items that assesses the frequency of occurrence of suicidal ideation within the past month was also utilized in the present study. The study was conducted after getting permission from the Director of the Department of Education (U), Manipur and the subjects were then contacted personally in their respective educational institution for collection of data. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and provided informed consent. The participants voluntarily and individually completed all questionnaires in a single session lasting about 1-2hours and the study was conducted during the year 2012-2014.

## 3. RESULTS

Table 1 (a) Age range of the participants

Subjects Variable	Number of cases	Mean±S.D
Age(18-26years)	100	21.16±2.08

Table 1 (b) Basic Profiles of the Participants

Subjects Variables	Number of Cases	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	24	24%
Female	76	76%
Total	100	100.0%
<b>Religion</b>		
Christian	40	40%
Hindu	40	40%
Muslim	20	20%
Total	100	100.0%
<b>Residence</b>		
Rural	83	83%
Urban	17	17%
Total	100	100%

<b>Type of Family</b>		
Nuclear family	84	84.0%
joint family	16	16.0%
Total	100	100.0%
<b>Monthly Income</b>		
Up to 10000	18	18%
10001 - 30000	52	52%
30001 and above	30	30%
Total	100	100.0%
<b>Birth Order</b>		
1st born	30	30%
Middle born	42	42%
Last born	28	28%
Total	100	100%

The table 1(a) and (b) reflects demographic variables of the participants. The age range of the participants were 18-26years (mean=21.16 and S.D=2.08). Female participants represented more than the male participants with 76% and 24%, respectively. With respect to religion, 40% were Hindu, 40% were Christian and 20% were Muslim. Regarding place of residence 83% were resided in rural area and 17% in urban area. When discuss on the type of family 84% belongs to nuclear family and only 16% belongs to joint family. About monthly income, 18% of the samples have income up to Rs. 10000/-, 52% have income between Rs 10001/- to 30000/- and 30% have income more than Rs 30001/- above. Regarding Birth Order, 30% of them were first born, 42% were middle born and 28% were last born.

**Table 2: Personality traits profile of Participants**

<b>Subjects</b> <b>Variables</b>	<b>No. of cases(N=100)</b>		
	<b>High</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Low</b>
Neuroticism	56(56%)	34(34%)	10(10%)
Extraversion	24(24%)	45(45%)	31(31%)
Openness to Experience	20(20%)	48(48%)	32(32%)
Agreeableness	46(46%)	44(44%)	10(10%)
Conscientiousness	33(33%)	40(40%)	27(27%)

The table no. 2 shows the following personality traits profile of the population:(a)Neuroticism: 56% of the students were having high neuroticism, 34% were in average range and only 10% were in low neuroticism; (b) Extraversion: 24% of them were having high extraversion, 45% were in average range and 31% were low scorer of extraversion ; (c) Openness to experience: 20% of them were having high openness, 48% were in average range and 32% were low scorer of openness; (d) Agreeableness: 46% of them were having high agreeableness, 44% were in average range and only 10% falls in the category of low agreeableness & (e) Conscientiousness: 33% of them were having high conscientiousness, 40% were in average range and only 27% falls in the category of low conscientiousness.

**Table 3 (a) shows Suicidal Ideation among College Students on ASIQ**

<b>Suicidal Ideation</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Presents	11	11%
Absents	89	89%
Total	100	100%

Table 3 (b) shows gender-wise distribution of Suicide Ideation among College Students on ASIQ

Suicidal Ideation	Gender		
	Absents	Presents	Total
Female	68 (68%)	8 (8%)	76(76%)
Male	21 (21%)	3(3%)	24 (24%)
Total	89 (89%)	11(11%)	100(100%)

Table 3(c) shows critical thought pattern of suicidal ideation on ASIQ

Critical Items	Number of Cases	Percentage
Present	7	63.6%
Absent	4	36.4%
Total	11	100%

Table - 3 shows the suicidal ideation among college going students. It is quite obvious from the table that out of the 100 subjects, 11 (11%) participants were having suicidal ideation and the rest 89 (89%) subjects were not having suicidal ideation. When analyzed in terms of gender of the subjects, it has also been observed that 8 female students and 3 were having suicidal ideation. Further, it has been observed that in the group of those having suicidal ideation 7 participants had specified their actual thoughts and plans of killing themselves which signifies as crisis and critical thought pattern meaning by a potential for more serious self-destructive behavior.

Table 4: Correlation between personality traits and Suicidal Ideation among college students on NEO-PI-R and ASIQ

Subjects \ Personality	No. of cases	Mean $\pm$ S.D.	Pearson Correlation	P-Value
Neuroticism	56	63.08 $\pm$ 6.22	0.813(**)	0.000
Extraversion	31	38.54 $\pm$ 4.8	0.374(**)	0.038
Openness to Experience	32	39.15 $\pm$ 4.8	0.033	0.3.87
Agreeableness	10	37.81 $\pm$ 5.9	-0.261	0.467
Conscientiousness	27	35.37 $\pm$ 7.00	0.437(**)	0.023

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table 4 shows the Pearson coefficient of correlation (r-value) between different personality traits domain and the suicidal ideation among participants and it has been found that high neuroticism, low extraversion and low conscientiousness are significant statistically significant with suicidal ideation.(High Neuroticism: Mean  $\pm$  S.D=63.08  $\pm$  6.22,r-value=0.813,p=0.000; Low Extraversion : Mean  $\pm$  S.D=38.54  $\pm$  4.8,r-value=0.374,p=0.038; Low Conscientiousness: Mean  $\pm$  S.D=35.37  $\pm$ 7.00,r-value= 0.437,p=0.023). Result indicated that there is positive high relationship between suicidal ideation and high neuroticism; moderate relationship between low extraversion and suicidal ideation; and moderate relationship between low conscientiousness and suicidal ideation. Result also indicated that low openness to experience (T score: Mean  $\pm$  S.D=39.15 $\pm$ 4.8, r- value=-0.158, p=0.387) and low agreeableness (T score: Mean  $\pm$  S.D=37.81  $\pm$ 5.9, r-value=-0.261,p=0.467) has insignificant relationship with suicidal ideation.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The present study evaluated suicidal ideation considered as an important precursor to latter attempted and completed suicide. Among the participants, 11(11%) students have potentially at high risk for suicide and self-destructive behavior. This finding implies that 1 in about 10 students have potentially high level of suicidal ideation, and female students are having more suicidal ideation than male students but the variation shows no significant difference between gender and suicidal ideation. Other studies do suggest that about 12.5% of the student had high suicidal ideation and that an estimated 6% of 1<sup>st</sup> year college students had suicidal ideation<sup>[17,18]</sup>.

The study also assessed the personality traits and its relationship with suicidal ideation. Elevated Neuroticism scale scores characterise individuals who are susceptible to psychological distress, which in turn interferes with an individual's adaptation and results in coping more poorly than others with stress<sup>[15]</sup>. It is proposed that elevated Neuroticism represents an individual's risk for suicidal behaviours as these individuals may resort to engaging in suicidal behaviours as a result of coping ineffectively with stress. In the present study, high neuroticism is significantly correlated with suicidal ideation which is consistent with the findings of previous studies that showed that individuals high in Neuroticism were more likely to present with a higher degree of suicide ideation<sup>[4, 5, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23]</sup>.

Specifically, low Extraversion scale scores characterise individuals who are introverted and socially withdrawn<sup>[15]</sup> and show evidence of poor interpersonal functioning. In the present study suicide ideation was linked with participants who were introverted, socially withdrawn and experience poor interpersonal functioning. The finding of the present study are consistent with previous findings that have variously indicated that the engagement in suicidal behaviour tends to be associated with introversion and social withdrawal<sup>[2,4,21,24,25]</sup>.

The present study further revealed that there is no relationship between Openness to Experience and suicide ideation. Specifically, Openness to Experience as conceptualised within the Five Factor Model describes the degree of an individual's curiosity about inner experiences and external world, and the willingness consider novel ideas and unconventional values<sup>[15]</sup>. A study that investigated age differences in personality of suicide completers found that low Openness to Experience was related to completed suicide among older adult indicated that the association between personality and suicidal behaviours differs across the life course; they also explained that at earlier phases of life, low scores on Openness to Experience may be adaptive as these individuals are more likely to experience emotions less intensely and as a consequence these individuals do not feel or report feeling about suicide<sup>[26]</sup>. However, low Openness to Experience could increase an individual's risk for completed suicide later on in life. Conversely this could indicate that selected personality traits may be associated with different forms of suicidal behaviour. Hence the insignificant finding on the relationship between Openness and suicide ideation in the present study does not necessarily indicate that this personality trait is not related to other forms of suicidal behaviour.

The present study also indicated insignificant relationship between Agreeableness and suicidal ideation. An agreeable individual is characterised by being altruistic, sympathetic, and cooperative, and is eager to help others and believes others will be helpful in return. In contrast, the antagonistic or disagreeable individual is sceptical of the other person's intentions, is egocentric and competitive<sup>[15]</sup>. A previous study that suggested that the traits that characterise individuals who score low on Agreeableness hinder these individuals from making new friends at the beginning of college when these individuals have recently left home and should make new friends in a new environment. It is suggested that the lack of close friends may increase the risk of suicide ideation<sup>[22]</sup>. Nevertheless the finding of the present study supports the findings of previous studies<sup>[6]</sup> which also showed insignificant correlation between Agreeableness and suicide ideation. Hence the inconsistent finding between the studies mentioned above could also be as a result of the difference related to sample size<sup>[23, 6]</sup>.

Specifically, personality features of individual's who score low on Conscientiousness, have a lower opinion of their abilities, low self-esteem or feel inept; are unreliable and aimless; procrastinate, give up easily and generally lack motivation and the ability to initiate and complete tasks; often act without considering the consequences; and are more hedonistic. These personality features have been previously correlated with suicide ideation and other suicidal behaviours. The present study revealed association between low scorer of openness and suicidal ideation. Several studies have found that young people who think about or attempt suicide have low levels of self-esteem or feelings of low self-worth<sup>[27, 28]</sup> being unreliable, aimless, and hedonistic has been associated with suicide completers among adults<sup>[28]</sup>, while

procrastinating, giving up easily and generally lacking the motivation and the ability to initiate and complete tasks, has been implicated as significantly predicting suicidal ideation<sup>[5]</sup>. The finding of the present study is therefore consistent with above mentioned studies.

## 5. CONCLUSION

National and International studies suggested that suicidal behaviour among college students is a serious problem. Vulnerability to suicidal behaviour is multifaceted and personality trait is one of them. The present study endeavoured to address which of the personality traits of the Five Factor Model of Personality were significantly related to suicidal ideation among college students. Among the personality traits, high neuroticism, low extraversion and low conscientiousness have been found relationship with suicidal ideation. Suicide ideation has been implicated as being the first warning sign of the eventual engagement in more serious suicidal behaviour such as attempted and completed suicide. Suicide ideation also represents a form of personal suffering and in certain instances reflects pathological maladaptive coping behaviour. Determining levels of suicide ideation could also inform intervention strategies aimed at addressing personal suffering and maladaptive coping behaviour. A better understanding of the personality profile can help not only in better academic and career choice as well as in prevention of mental health problems in the future.

## 6. LIMITATIONS

The present study addressed the gap in the area of research on the nature of the relationship between personality and suicide ideation in Manipur. The findings of the study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. The sample size was small, female students constitute the majority of the sample, majority of the samples were undergraduate students and different streams of studies could not be included in the studies thereby limiting the ability of analyses to detect statistically significant differences between the groups. Because of the reason stated above, the results may not be generalizable to the students of other institutions in other areas of the country, or to students attending other colleges. Suicide rates differ by geographic location, and it is unclear whether rates of suicide ideation may vary as well. The results of the present study cannot be assumed to predict a relationship between personality and suicide attempts or completed suicide and also cannot assume to determine the predisposing factors which independently contribute to the risk of engaging in suicidal behaviour. The study did not take account for the presence of psychological disorders or physical illness. It has been suggested that mental health problems might lead to suicidal thoughts, then attempt to completed suicide.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Krueger RF, Caspi A, Moffitt TE. Epidemiological personology: the unifying role of personality in population-based research on problem behaviors. *J Pers.* 2000; 68:967-998.
- [2] Beautrias AL. Risk Factors for Suicide and Attempted Suicide among Young People. *Aust N Z J Psychiatry.*1994; 34(3): 420-436.
- [3] Chioqueta AP, Stiles TC. Suicide risk in outpatients with specific mood and anxiety disorders. *Crisis.*2003; 24:105–112.
- [4] Lester D. Suicidal Preoccupation and Dysthymia in College Students. *Psychol Rep.*1987; 61: 762.
- [5] Velting DM. Suicidal Ideation and the Five-Factor Model of Personality. *Personal Individ Differen.*1999; 27: 943-952.
- [6] Renberg ES. Self-reported life weariness, death wishes, suicidal ideation, suicidal plans and suicide attempts in general population surveys in the north of Sweden 1986 and 1996. *Soc Psychiatr Epidemiol.*2001; 36: 429–436.
- [7] Perez WV. The relationship between seriously considering, planning, and attempting suicide in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. *Suicide Life Threat Behav.*2005; 35:35–49.
- [8] Rudd MD. Fluid vulnerability theory: a cognitive approach to understanding the process of acute and chronic suicide risk. In: Ellis PT, ed. *Cognition and suicide: theory, research and therapy.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association; 2006.p. 355–68.

- [9] Esposito C, Spirito A, Boergers J, Donaldson, D.(2003). Affective, behavioral, and cognitive functioning in adolescents with multiple suicide attempts. *Suicide Life Threat Behav.*2003; 33: 389–399.
- [10] World Health Organisation. Burden of mental and behavioural disorders: Suicide; 2005. Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/whr/2001/chapter2/en/index6.html>.
- [11] Anderson RN, Smith BL. Deaths: Leading causes for 2002.Natl Vital Stat Rep: from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System. 2005; 53(17):1-89.
- [12] Schwartz AJ. College student suicide in the United States: 1990–1991 through 2003–2004. *J Am Coll Health.*2006; 54(6):341–352.
- [13] National Crime Records Bureau. Accidental Deaths and suicides in India. Ministry of Home Affairs. Government of India; 2012.
- [14] Goldberg D, Williams P. A users guide to the General Health Questionnaire. Slough: NFER-Nelson; 1988.
- [15] Costa PT, McCrae RR. NEO-P-R: Professional Manual. Florida: Psychological Assessment Resources; 1992.
- [16] Williams MR. Adult Suicidal Ideation Questionnaire: Professional Manual. Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc. P.O.BOX 998/Odessa, Florida 33556; 1991.
- [17] Ishita C, Jayanti B. Perceived Causes of Suicide, Reasons for Living and Suicidal Ideation among Students. *J Indian Aca Appl Psychol.*2010July; 36(2):311-316.
- [18] Amelia M, Arria KE, O’Grady KM, Caldeira KB, Vincent, Holly C. Wilcox Eric D. Wish. Suicide ideation among college students: A multivariate analysis. *Arch Suicide Resources.*2009; 13(3): 230–246. DOI: 10.1080/13811110903044351
- [19] Fergusson DM, Beautrais AL, Horwood LJ. Vulnerability and Resiliency to Suicidal Behaviors in Young People. *Psychol Med.*2003; 33: 61-73.
- [20] Fergusson DM, Woodward LJ, Horwood LJ. Risk Factors and Life Processes Associated with the Onset of Suicidal Behaviour during Adolescence and Early Adulthood. *Psychol Med.*2000; 30: 23-39.
- [21] Irfani S. Personality Correlates of Suicidal Tendency among Iranian and Turkish Students. *J Psychol.*1978; 99:151-153.
- [22] Kerby DS. CART analysis with unit weighted regression to predict suicidal ideation from Big Five traits. *Personal Individ Differ.*2003; 35: 249–261.
- [23] Mehryar AH, Hekmat H, Khajavi, AF (1977). Some personality correlates of contemplated suicide. *Psychological Reports.*1977; 40: 1291–1294.
- [24] Farmer A, Redman K, Harris T, Mahmood A, Sadler S, Pickering A et al. Neuroticism, Extraversion, Life Events and Depression: The Cardiff Depression Study. *Br J Psychiatry.*2002; 181: 118-122.
- [25] Janowsky DS, Morter S, Hong L. Relationship of Myers Briggs Type Indicator Personality Characteristics to Suicidality in Affective Disorder Patients. *J Psychiatr Res.*2002; 36: 33-39.
- [26] Duberstein PR, Conwell Y, Caine ED. Age Differences in the Personality Characteristics of Suicide Completers: Preliminary Findings from a Psychological Autopsy Study. *Psychiatry.*1994; 57: 213-224.
- [27] McGee R, Williams S, Nada-Raja S. Low Self-Esteem and Hopelessness in Childhood and Suicidal Ideation in Early Adulthood. *J Abnorm Child Psychol.*2001; 29(4): 281-291.
- [28] Overholser JC, Adams DM, Lehnert KL, Brinkman DC. Self-Esteem Deficits and Suicidal Tendencies among Adolescents. *J Am Acad Child Adoles Psychiatry.*1995; 34(7): 919-928.