



## A Comparative Study of Five Personality Factors among Employed and Unemployed People

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Professional identity is a part of human identity and career has a beneficial impact on psychological health. The importance of personality in job achievement has also been increasingly concerned in economics.

**Objective:** To compare the Big Five personality factors between employed and unemployed persons.

**Materials and Methods:** This study was an applied cross sectional analytic descriptive research of a comparative type which was conducted from January 2012 to March 2012. The sample size was thirty in each group of employed and unemployed subjects, chosen randomly from male population of a city in the North of Iran with purposive sampling method. Age and education level of subjects were controlled according to labor market conditions. For collecting data, the NEO inventory was used; five factors of personality can be assessed by which. The data were analyzed by SPSS software version 19 through descriptive and inferential statistics using independent t-test.

**Results:** A total of thirty employed and 30 unemployed men in the age range of 20-50 years participated in the study.

The neuroticism score was higher in unemployed persons ( $p = 0.001$ ). The openness score resulted in no significant difference between employed and unemployed people ( $p = 0.96$ ). The scores of extroversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness were significantly higher among employed people rather the unemployed ones ( $p = 0.01, 0.001$  and  $0.01$ , respectively).

**Conclusion:** Personality traits except openness have significant relationship with employment, neuroticism may have a negative relationship, and the other personality traits maybe in the positive relationships with employment.

**Keywords:** Personality; Unemployment; Employment

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### Introduction

Studies have shown that professional identity is a part of human identity and work has a beneficial impact on psychological health (1). Recently, the importance of personality in labors

achievements also has been increasingly concerned in economics (2-9). For most of the people having a job is considered something beyond making ends meet. Jobresults in a better social status and

maintains psychological and physical activity of the individuals. It gives order and structure to one's life, promotes his efforts and creates a sense of common purpose. Unemployed people are worried about their health status and are considered regular visitors of physicians. Job is a regular activity performed in exchange for payment, especially as one's trade, occupation, or profession (10). Professional identity has a beneficial impact on mental health. Undoubtedly, unemployment has a harmful effect on mental health, in return (11).

Previous studies in psychology have shown that personality is related to labor market performance such as earnings, vocational interests, job performance, and career success (12). Also sociologists have written extensively about the role of non-cognitive skills in predicting occupational attainment and wages (13).

The unemployment refers to a long-term stop of work because of different reasons. In the spoken language, the unemployment is defined as mandatory lack of work, whether due to not finding a job or due to losing a job (14). In an economic dimension, the unemployment outcome is to create pseudo-careers, poverty and inflation, and in a social dimension, it is social tensions and delinquency. But aside from it, the unemployment is one of the predisposing factors to generate psychological disorders. The unemployment is one of the most important factors to create the mental stress in the adults' life, as some of the rows in the quantitative table of Holms & Rahe have been occupied by it and its outcomes (15). The significant economic lack due to unemployment is generally a major cause of depression and suicide (16). In the recent years, the unemployment and related

psychological complications have been more considered and the research achievements in this regard have proved the worrying findings about the unemployment outcomes for the unemployed people and their family. In addition, the research achievements suggest that a lack of appropriate mental health is undoubtedly one of the justified factors in the unemployment. On the other hand, the employed people who suffer from psychological disorders to some extent have more self-esteem than the unemployed people who have the same psychological problems (17).

The five-factor theory of personality that is known as the Big Five Factor theory was proposed by two American psychologists named Costa P.T. and McCrae R.R. in the late eighty decade and it was re-evaluated in the early ninety decade. Digman believes that the Five-Factor theory shows the structure of human personality characteristics and it is the result of the scientific efforts in this field (18). The empirical research of Goldberg that is very comprehensive and pervasive according to Matthews's explanation, confirms the Big Five Factor theory (19-21). Recently, the five factor model of personality has been more considered in the attributes theory (22). This model includes the following dimensions: Neuroticism (N), Extroversion (E), Openness (O), Agreeableness (A) and Conscientiousness (C). Costa and McCrae have introduced these five factors as the basic tendencies with a biological background, which means that, these tendencies are endogenous dispositions and they are not likely to be influenced directly by the environment. By re-proposing the nature against education issue, these two researchers state their opinion as the follow: "The gist is that the personality attributes, such as temperament and internal

preparation, are developing and essentially are independent of the environmental impacts" (23, 24).

With respect to this explanation, the present study aimed to identify the effective factors of personality in finding a job and taking advantage of job opportunities.

## Materials and Methods

Regarding the purpose, this cross sectional analytic study is kind of applied research and in terms of the data collection; it is kind of descriptive and comparative research. The project design was approved by ethic committee of Research and Technology Vice-chancellorship of International Branch of Islamic Azad University of Kish.

It was accomplished from January 2012 to March 2012 in a city which is located in the North of Iran. The population of this research includes sixty contributors chosen from male inhabitants of abovementioned city with purposive sampling method. Gathering of data was carried out after fulfilling an informed consent by participants. The unemployment means not have a job for at least one year before study. The subjects were chosen according to labor market conditions from the same age and education level in order to avoid any interference with variable, as the borderline for age and educational level were set at 20 years of age and diploma degree, respectively. None of them used any kind of psychomodulator drugs.

With respect to the study method, i.e. a casual-comparative method, the sample size was determined as 60 persons. For the pilot researches that are kind of experimental and -comparative study, it has been recommended at least 30 people in each group for the sample size (25). In order to collect the required data, the NEO inventory was used in

this study. This inventory is a shortened form of the NEO personality inventory that was prepared by Costa P.T. and McCrae R.R. in 1985 and it has been normalized by Garousi Farshi. This inventory includes 60 questions and it is used to assess the five factors of personality, i.e. *neuroticism*, *extroversion*, *openness*, *agreeableness* and *conscientiousness*. A designed questionnaire included 12 questions for each factor was used and based on the received response; each question was scored from zero to four. The subject should choose one of the following responses for each question: Completely agree, Agree, No comment, Disagree, Completely disagree.

Method of analysis was independent t-test by using SPSS software version 19.

## Results

In this descriptive-analytic study a total of sixty men in the age range of 20-50 year participated who half of them were employed and the other thirty men were unemployed.

Deliberation of the *neuroticism* factor resulted in the significant difference ( $p = 0.001$ ) observed between the two group's mean scores which is higher among unemployed persons. By assessing the *extroversion*, the results showed that the score of *extroversion* is significantly higher among employed people rather the unemployed ones ( $p = 0.01$ ), although the difference seems a little (5.59 vs. 5.04). Evaluation of the *openness* resulted in no significant difference between employed and unemployed people as the matter of this character ( $p=0.96$ ). In regard of *agreeableness*, a great difference was achieved between studied groups with obviously higher score among employed persons ( $p = 0.001$ ). Comparing the scores of

*conscientiousness* resulted in the higher score of employed persons, with significant

difference, rather than unemployed persons ( $p = 0.01$ ) (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Comparison the means of Five Personality Factors between two studied groups

	Groups statistical index	Mean( $\pm$ SD)	Difference of the Means	t-value	Freedom degree	Significance level
<b>Neuroticism</b>	Employed	16.26 $\pm$ 7.22	-6.90	-3.82	58	0.001
	Unemployed	23.16 $\pm$ 6.754				
<b>Extroversion</b>	Employed	29.76 $\pm$ 5.59	3.53	2.56	58	0.01
	Unemployed	26.33 $\pm$ 5.04				
<b>Openness</b>	Employed	25.80 $\pm$ 5.11	-0.066	-0.05	58	0.96
	Unemployed	25.86 $\pm$ 5.01				
<b>Agreeableness</b>	Employed	36.20 $\pm$ 4.83	5.20	3.77	58	0.001
	Unemployed	29.00 $\pm$ 5.79				
<b>Conscientiousness</b>	Employed	36.73 $\pm$ 5.45	4.25	2.55	58	0.01
	Unemployed	32.53 $\pm$ 7.30				

## Discussion

The current study aimed to conduct a comparative research of the five factors of personality among the male employed and unemployed persons.

The results determined a significant difference between employed and unemployed male as the matter of *neuroticism*, so that the unemployed group were more neurotic. In a study by Khakpour et al. in Iran, it has been found that, among personality traits, neuroticism— defined as the tendency to express anxiety, fear, negative affect or self-reproach – was significantly related to job performance (task-contextual) (26). In another study carried out by Boudreau et al. neuroticism was shown to be related positively to job search (27). Michel et al., in a meta-analytic review have shown that it is related to negative work–nonwork spillover ( $\beta = -0.29$ ) (28). Uysal and Pohlmeier, empirical findings in the study about "unemployment duration and personality" reveal that the personality trait, *neuroticism* has a strong impact on the instantaneous probability of finding a job, as a negative effect. Based on individual

unemployment data taken from the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) also it has been confirmed (29). In the study of O’Sullivan et al. *neuroticism* significantly contributed to length of prior employment among persons with low education (30). Sue describing a study co-written by David Strauser, at the University of Illinois about the effect of personality traits on employment, reports the personality trait, *neuroticism* was found to be predictor of contextual work behavior self-efficacy. People who scored higher in *neuroticism* reported lower confidence in performing work behaviors. The results also indicated that *neuroticism* was significantly related to length of prior employment for people who had a high school education or less but not for people who had postsecondary education (31). Viinikainen et al. by a longitudinal research on personality and unemployment, found that *neuroticism* was associated with longer durations of individual unemployment spells (9).

In the present study, there was a significant difference between employed and unemployed males as the point of

extroversion, as employed group are more extraverted. In the study of Khakpour et al., it has shown that, among personality traits, extroversion was also significantly related to job performance (task-contextual) (26). In the study of Boudreau et al., the relationship between extroversion and job search was significant and positive in the presence of situational factors, particularly job satisfaction (27). Michel et al. in his meta-analytic review have shown extroversion is related to negative work–nonwork spillover ( $\beta = -0.08$ ), and is related to positive work–nonwork spillover ( $\beta = 0.27$ ) (28). Viinikainen et al. by a longitudinal research on personality and unemployment, found that extroversion had negative associations with cumulative unemployment and the number of unemployment spells (9).

But there was no significant difference between employed and unemployed male as a matter of openness. Also in the study of Khakpour et al. it has shown that, among personality traits, *openness* was not significantly related to job performance (task-contextual) (26). But in the Boudreau et al. study openness related positively to job search (27) and Michel et al. in a meta-analytic review have shown *openness* was related to positive work–nonwork spillover ( $\beta = 0.20$ ) (28). The findings of Uysal and Pohlmeier investigation revealed that the *openness* eases finding a job only for female unemployed workers and workers with migration background (29). In the study of O’Sullivan et al. *openness* significantly attributed to length of prior employment (30). Also Sue reported the personality trait; *openness* was found to have a significant impact on length of prior employment and emerged as the greatest predictor of employment tenure. It can be explained by

being open to new experiences, willing to try different things and thinking of things differently which allows them to do better and meet the demands of the work environment a little bit better (31). Eventually Viinikainen et al. found that higher scores in *openness* were associated with both increased duration of cumulative unemployment and the number of unemployment spells between ages 33 and 50 (9). Such as the first two traits were explained which; *agreeableness* obtained a higher score by employed group rather than unemployed one. Khakpour et al. also defined it as a trait related to job performance (task-contextual) (26). Also Boudreau et al. considered it as a positively related factor to job search (28). Michel et al. have shown that it is related to negative work–nonwork spillover ( $\beta = -0.06$ ), and is related to positive work–nonwork spillover ( $\beta = 0.11$ ). Viinikainen et al. found that *agreeableness* was related to decreased cumulative duration of unemployment (9).

Finally employed group resulted to be more conscientious than the other group. Michel et al. have shown *conscientiousness* is related to negative work–nonwork spillover ( $\beta = -0.13$ ), and to positive work–nonwork spillover ( $\beta = 0.12$ ) (28). Uysal and Pohlmeier revealed that the personality trait, *conscientiousness* have a strong impact on the instantaneous probability of finding a job (29). Sue reported that the personality trait, *conscientiousness* was found to be predictor of contextual work behavior self-efficacy. People who scored higher on *conscientiousness* reported higher levels of work behavior self-efficacy (31).

## Conclusion

There can be a significant relationship between the personality attributes and the employment. As the high score acquisition in

the *neuroticism* has a negative and significant relationship with the unemployment of people, while the other personality attributes except *openness* showed a positive and significant relationship with the employment.

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## Conflict of Interest

No Conflict of Interest

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