

# ***Research on the Effect of Personality Traits on Help-seeking Behavior and Intention***

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**Abstract:** This study explores the relationship between various personality scales and traits, and the intention to seek professional help when troubling with mental distress. It aimed to identify the scales and traits that most influence help-seeking intentions and determine which had the greatest predictive strength. Using the THE HEXACO PERSONALITY INVENTORY - REVISED (HEXACO-PI-R), this study measured personality traits of 117 American participants from the CloudResearch website, all of whom were 18 years or older and received monetary compensation. The Mental Help Seeking Intention Scale was used to measure the participants' willingness to seek professional mental help. The findings suggest a moderate and statistically significant positive correlation between help-seeking intention and the traits of openness to experience, conscientiousness, and emotionality. This study contributes to the understanding of how personality influences mental health help-seeking behaviors, offering potentially valuable insights for tailoring intervention strategies.

**Keywords:** personality traits, mental health assistance, HEXACO personality inventory, help-seeking intention, predictive analysis

## **1. Introduction**

According to the National Health Institute, nearly one in five American adults suffers from mental illness. Also, nearly half of the American adults will experience mental illness at some point in their lives. Yet only 41 percent of people with mental illness receive treatment in the United States, according to the National Council for Well-Being. In this case, the original intention of the research design is to let more people with mental problems but not receiving help understand the fact that they should take the initiative to receive treatment. In fact, studies have shown that personality traits can predict mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression [1]. For example, neuroticism in young adulthood is a marker of risk for anxiety and depression. At the same time, some studies have pointed out that personality traits can predict help-seeking behaviors for mental health disorders [2]. In particular, it mentions that high levels of conscientiousness are associated with help-seeking in depression. According to Schäfer et al. [3], personality traits significantly affect health care use. Other studies also have shown that personality traits are related to attitudes towards psychotherapy [4]. Openness to experience is associated with positive attitudes toward psychological help-seeking. Based on what had been discussed above, the study was designed to focus on linking different personality scales and traits to help-seeking intention. HEXACO Personality Inventory, instead of the

Big Five Personality Inventory was adopted to measure different personality dimensions and specific traits.

The Big Five Personality Inventory has been among the most popular personality tests for decades. In recent years, the HEXACO Personality Inventory, derived from the Big Five, has begun to enter the public's field of vision. The replacement of neuroticism with honesty-humility and emotionality made the new HEXACO a more comprehensive measure of personality. Miranda et al. demonstrated the relationship between HEXACO model and stress perception and coping strategies [5], which could potentially link to our target of mental health treatment-seeking behaviors. There is also a study comparing the HEXACO model to the Big Five and discussed its relationship with health behaviors, providing further rationale for our use of HEXACO instead of the Big Five [6]. People who are open to experience means that they tend to be imaginative and creative in their lives [7]. They will be more aware of their feelings than ordinary people. Conscientiousness is a spectrum of constructs that describe individual differences in the propensity to be self-controlled, responsible to others, hardworking, orderly, and rule-abiding [8]. Therefore, people with high level of conscientiousness should know themselves better and have stricter requirements for themselves. With a responsible attitude towards themselves, they should be more inclined to seek help when facing mental problems. In previous studies, it was found that most of the personality dimensions were using Big Five as the standard. In this study, the more comprehensive HEXACO measurement was adopted.

In summary, the study proposed the hypothesis that conscientiousness and openness to experience will be positively correlated with willingness to seek help. At the same time, we further studied which scale can best predict help-seeking intention. Detailed traits were also analyzed.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Participants**

The participant pool was originally comprised of 155 participants over 18 years old. All participants were American users of the CloudResearch website who completed the study online in exchange for monetary compensation of \$1.5. However, due to an abnormally-short completion time (which means low-quality answers) and incomplete answers, the study finally had 117 participants, including 45 males and 71 females, and one individual with unreported gender.

### **2.2. Materials**

All scales implemented used English.

### **2.3. 100-item HEXACO-PI-R**

The personality scales and traits were measured using the 100-item HEXACO-PI-R [9]. This inventory measures the HEXACO personality scales and consists of 4 traits of each scale (5 for openness to experience scale). Every question contains 5 statements for participants to rate their agreement with (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). The score of each trait comes from the addition of the scores of corresponding questions. The score of each scale comes from the mean of the scores of related traits. Higher scores indicate greater levels in certain personality scales or traits. An example of openness to experience measurement is "People see me a hard-hearted person." An example of conscientiousness measurement is "When working, I sometimes have difficulties due to being disorganized."

For Openness to Experience measurement, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .701, concluding that the scale is at a satisfying level.

For Conscientiousness measurement, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .812, concluding that the scale is at a satisfying level.

For Honesty-Humility measurement, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .837, concluding that the scale is at a satisfying level.

For Emotionality measurement, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .709, concluding that the scale is at a satisfying level.

For Extraversion measurement, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .657, concluding that the scale is at a satisfying level.

For Agreeableness measurement, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .604, concluding that the scale is at a satisfying level.

#### 2.4. Mental Help Seeking Intention Scale

The willingness to seek help was measured using the Mental Help Seeking Intention Scale [10]. This scale measures the participants' help-seeking intention. For the three questions in total, we added "If I had a mental health concern" at the beginning of each question so that all participants would answer the scale with the assumption that they have a mental health concern. There are 5 statements for participants to rate their agreement with (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Higher scores indicate greater help-seeking intention. An example of this scale is "If I had a mental health concern, I would intend to seek help from a mental health professional."

For the Mental Help Seeking Intention Scale, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .923, concluding that the scale is at a satisfying level.

#### 2.5. Procedure

Participants were recruited from the CloudResearch website and completed the study online in exchange for monetary compensation of \$1.5. People interested in the online study, which was being advertised on the Prime Panels of CloudResearch website, were redirected to the website where they completed a survey. The survey was a combination of the 100-item HEXACO-PI-R and the Mental Help Seeking Intention Scale. Participants filled out the survey, and then the online service company compiled the data and sent it to the researchers. Researchers then evaluated the personality scales and traits, and help-seeking intention using SPSS. All scores were computed before correlational analysis and regression analysis were performed. All regressions were 2-tailed. Consent was confirmed by all participants before the study began. Monetary compensation was approved by the researchers to be awarded to participants after the researchers confirmed the quality of answers. As the last question of the survey, the researchers added a question that goes, "My attitudes towards help-seeking are not due to family influence, but based on my own wills." Another separate analysis of the relationship between family influence and the help-seeking intention was performed.

### 3. Results

After quantitative analysis, the means and standard deviations for all personality scales and help-seeking intention were acquired. For openness to experience,  $M = 13.04$ ;  $SD = 2.04$ . For conscientiousness,  $M = 13.49$ ;  $SD = 2.62$ . For honesty-humility,  $M = 13.30$ ;  $SD = 2.90$ . For emotionality,  $M = 12.78$ ;  $SD = 2.20$ . For extraversion,  $M = 11.98$ ;  $SD = 2.04$ . For agreeableness,  $M = 12.42$ ;  $SD = 1.84$ . For help-seeking intention,  $M = 3.55$ ;  $SD = 1.16$ .

Correlation analysis was computed. Openness to experience was found to be significantly positively correlated to help-seeking intention,  $r(117) = .410$ ,  $p < .001$ . The correlation relationship was moderate. Conscientiousness was found to be significantly positively correlated to help-seeking intention,  $r(117) = .407$ ,  $p < .001$ . The correlation relationship was moderate. Emotionality was found

to be significantly positively correlated to help-seeking intention,  $r(117) = .435$ ,  $p < .001$ . The correlation relationship was moderate. Honesty-Humility ( $r = .260$ ), Extraversion ( $r = .277$ ) and Agreeableness ( $r = .216$ ) were also found to be significantly positively correlated to help-seeking intention with  $p < .05$ , but the correlation relationships were weak.

Besides, when analyzing the detailed trait, it was discovered that altruism ( $r = .555$ ), diligence ( $r = .454$ ), gentleness ( $r = .451$ ) and sentimentality ( $r = .488$ ) showed a significantly positive correlation to help-seeking intention with  $p < .001$ . The correlation relationships were moderate.

Eventually, a multiple regression analysis was done. The six HEXACO scales explained 33.0% of the variance in help-seeking intention,  $R^2 = .330$ ,  $F(117) = 9.040$ ,  $p < .001$ . Only emotionality is confirmed to be a significant predictor over others,  $b = .188$ ,  $t(117) = 4.172$ ,  $p < .001$ , referring to Figure 1. Emotionality was the strongest predictor of help-seeking intention,  $\beta(\text{emotionality}) = .355$ .

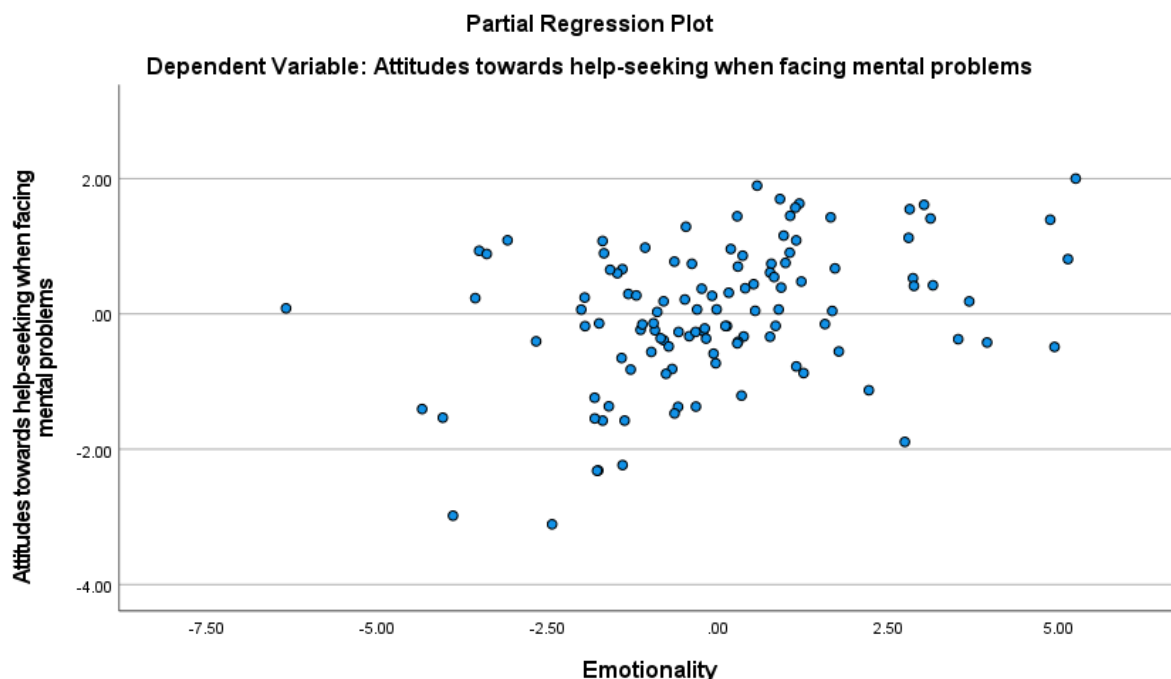


Figure 1: Regression plot between help-seeking intention and emotionality.

The relationship between family influence and help-seeking intention was insignificant with  $p > .5$ .

#### 4. Discussion

The results of the data analysis confirmed that our hypothesis was correct. Both openness to experience and conscientiousness were positively correlated with help-seeking intention. After the analysis, it was found that emotionality was also positively correlated with help-seeking intention and was a unique significant predictor. Effort was made to try to explain this observation. On the scale of emotionality, there are two traits of fearfulness and sentimentality. They all showed a significant positive correlation with help-seeking intention. People with a high level of fearfulness may be more inclined to seek help since they are fearful of the negative consequences their mental problems may bring them about. People with high levels of sentimentality are more sensitive to their mental status, making them more likely to seek help when there is the existence of mental problems. At the same time, it was also found a significant positive correlation between gentleness and diligence, and help-seeking intention. It was speculated that people with high levels of gentleness will pay more attention to their manners. Therefore, when they realize that mental problems may affect their manners and

behaviors, they may more probably seek help. People with high levels of diligence pursue the meticulous and consistent effort. Mental problems are likely to affect their concentration, so they will seek help.

It is delighted to observe that the average score of help-seeking intention is higher than 3.5, which means that people participating in the study are more inclined to seek help when facing mental problems.

It has to be admitted that this study has several shortcomings. First of all, because the data analysis is eventually based on the responses of 117 Americans, the internal and external validity of this study is greatly affected. Increasing the number of participants and repeating the study in different settings or backgrounds are necessary. Fortunately, HEXACO Inventory already has several official versions of different languages, which lay the foundation for future studies.

Secondly, since this study is based entirely on questionnaires, the impact of response bias cannot be ignored. Especially during personality tests, participants may be inclined to submit answers that maintain their image. Again, the solution to this problem is to increase the number of participants.

The third is the impact of insufficient research funds for this study. When screening the data, it was noticed that nearly 20 people completed the questionnaire with 105 questions in less than three minutes. Likewise, many people submitted incomplete answers. Therefore, there were doubts about the quality of this data. The fact that only \$1.50 was paid to qualified participants may explain the low quality of the answers. People participate in the study for monetary compensation, so the impact of insufficient rewards may exceed our expectations. When repeating the study in the future, it is necessary to increase the rewards for participants to improve their serious attitudes in filling out the questionnaire.

## 5. Conclusion

In summary, the results of this study are encouraging. It was found that there are still many people who choose to seek help when facing mental problems. But it is also hoped that people who read this article can pay more attention to other people with corresponding personality traits based on our conclusions. It is expected that the readers to reach out to them and help them get professional treatment when they need help and have not come forward themselves. It is hoped that the derived studies can continue, so that more people can be aware of the problem and get help.

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