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Personality Traits and Happiness among Central Government Employees in India: A Correlational and Predictive Study

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ABSTRACT

Happiness is an important aspect of employee well-being, but its relationship with personality may vary across occupational settings. Central government employment provides a context characterized by formal procedures, public accountability and interdependent roles. This study examined the associations of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism with happiness and their joint statistical prediction of happiness. A quantitative, cross-sectional analysis of a broader doctoral study included 153 permanent employees with at least five years of service from five central government organizations. Final Big Five dimension scores and the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire composite were analyzed using Pearson correlations and simultaneous multiple regression. Agreeableness correlated positively with happiness ($r = .241$, $p = .003$); openness, conscientiousness, extraversion and neuroticism did not show significant associations. The overall regression model was significant, $R = .272$, $R^2 = .074$, adjusted $R^2 = .043$, $F(5, 147) = 2.356$, $p = .043$. Agreeableness was the only significant unique predictor ($B = .723$, $SE = .256$, $\beta = .246$, $t = 2.83$, $p = .005$). The findings indicate a selective personality–happiness relationship, with 7.4% of happiness variance explained. Organizational and other personal influences warrant consideration, but their contributions and causal effects were not established.

Keywords: personality traits, Big Five, happiness, subjective well-being, central government employees, agreeableness

INTRODUCTION

Central government employees translate public policy into services across scientific research, regulation, disability services, taxation and infrastructure. Their work combines formal procedures and hierarchy with demands for cooperation, judgement and public accountability. Understanding happiness in this setting is relevant to employees' adjustment and their capacity to sustain demanding public roles.

Happiness extends beyond momentary pleasure or job satisfaction. Subjective well-being includes evaluations of life and experiences of positive and negative affect (Diener, 1984, 2000). Workplace happiness encompasses several experiences and attitudes (Fisher, 2010), while field research links employee happiness with productivity (Bellet et al., 2024). Such findings establish its organizational relevance without demonstrating that results from commercial settings generalize to government employment.

The Big Five dimensions—openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism—describe broad differences in cognition, self-regulation, interpersonal behaviour and emotional reactivity. Meta-analyses associate these traits with subjective and psychological well-being, although the strength of associations varies across measures and contexts (Anglim et al., 2020; Steel et al., 2008; Busseri & Erb, 2024). Government institutions may shape how these dispositions are expressed through stable service rules, formal authority and interdependent work. Evidence from federal office workers supports personality–environment associations with happiness (Baranski et al., 2023), while Indian public-service research connects personality with well-being through organizational citizenship behaviour (Mishra et al., 2023).

The present paper examines the personality–happiness component of a broader doctoral investigation. It asks which Big Five traits correlate with happiness and whether they predict happiness when considered simultaneously in this sample.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Personality and Subjective Well-Being

Personality may shape well-being through recurring patterns of attention, appraisal, emotion regulation and social interaction. Steel et al. (2008) identified personality as an important correlate of subjective well-being and showed that estimated relationships depend partly on the measures used. Their findings caution against assuming a universal personality–happiness pattern.

Anglim et al. (2020) synthesized 462 studies involving more than 334,000 participants. Their meta-analysis linked personality domains and facets with subjective and psychological well-being. Neuroticism was associated with poorer well-being; extraversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness generally showed positive associations. Openness varied more across well-being dimensions, and facets provided information beyond broad domains.

Using meta-analytic structural equation modelling, Busseri and Erb (2024) found unique associations of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and lower neuroticism with a latent subjective well-being factor, but not openness. These aggregate findings do not require every trait to be significant in every occupational sample; measurement, context and restricted variability may affect individual studies. Indian evidence also supports contextual interpretation. Tanksale (2015) found that Big Five associations differed across life satisfaction and affect. Among employees associated with government bodies under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Mishra et al. (2023) found that organizational citizenship behaviour helped explain personality–well-being relationships.

Agreeableness as a Relational Resource

Agreeableness reflects trust, empathy, cooperation and concern for harmonious relationships. Agreeable individuals may experience less interpersonal conflict, greater social support and more reciprocal helping. These pathways may matter in organizations where employees depend on colleagues and supervisors to coordinate work and respond to the public. Meta-analyses generally identify agreeableness as a positive correlate of well-being, although its association is often smaller than those involving neuroticism or extraversion (Anglim et al., 2020; Busseri & Erb, 2024). Formal procedures do not eliminate interpersonal negotiation, so a cooperative style may help employees manage routine demands. The citizenship-behaviour findings of Mishra et al. (2023) offer a possible interpersonal explanation. However, the present study does not test mediation and cannot establish how agreeableness relates to happiness.

Workplace Context and Happiness

Workplace happiness should not be reduced to personality. Fisher (2010) distinguished multiple positive states and attitudes, suggesting the relevance of conditions such as leadership, fairness, workload, autonomy and team climate. These conditions may support or undermine well-being alongside individual dispositions.

Baranski et al. (2023) found that workstation type interacted with personality in relation to focus and happiness among federal office workers. Bellet et al. (2024) linked employee happiness with productivity in a field setting. Neither workplace conditions nor productivity were tested in the present analysis.

Central government employment combines job stability and public-service roles with procedural demands and hierarchy. Examining personality and happiness in this setting therefore adds occupational context to the broader literature.

OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

The first objective was to examine the relationship between the five Big Five personality traits and happiness among central government employees in India. The second objective was to determine whether the Big Five traits jointly and individually predict happiness in this sample.

H01: There will be no significant relationship between openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, and happiness among central government employees in India.

H02: The five Big Five personality traits will not significantly predict happiness among central government employees in India.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive, correlational, and predictive design was used. The analysis reported in this paper forms one component of a broader doctoral study. Because all variables were measured at one point in time, the regression model is interpreted as statistical prediction rather than evidence that personality causes changes in happiness.

Participants and Sampling

The sample consisted of 153 permanent central government employees. Participants were drawn from five organizations representing different public-service functions: the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disabilities/National Institute for the Visually Handicapped (NIEPVD/NIVH), Income Tax Department, and Central Public Works Department (CPWD). Only permanent employees with a minimum of five years of work experience were included so that respondents had meaningful exposure to organizational procedures, role expectations, and the institutional work environment. A non-probability convenience sampling strategy was used because participation depended on institutional access, employee availability, voluntary consent, and satisfaction of the inclusion criteria. The resulting sample should therefore be interpreted as a multi-organization public-sector sample rather than as a probability sample of all central government employees in India.

Table 1

Sample Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	n
Gender	Female	32
	Male	121
Marital status	Married	133
	Unmarried	20
Organization	ICAR	96
	BIS	12
	NIEPVD/NIVH	20
	Income Tax Department	17
	CPWD	8

Note. N = 153. The sample was convenience-based and should not be interpreted as nationally representative.

Measures

Personality traits. Personality was represented through final scores on the five Big Five dimensions: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. The traits were analyzed separately rather than collapsed into a single general personality score. This treatment is consistent with the purpose of the analysis, which was to determine whether particular dispositional dimensions show different relationships with happiness.

Happiness. Happiness was assessed with the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ; Hills & Argyle, 2002). The OHQ was developed as a compact measure of general psychological happiness and well-being. In its standardization study, it showed high internal consistency ($\alpha = .91$) and satisfactory evidence of validity. This published reliability coefficient is not an estimate for the present sample. The final transformed composite happiness score used in the doctoral dataset was retained for the present analyses. It measures general happiness rather than workplace happiness specifically.

Procedure and Ethical Safeguards

Participants were informed that the data were being collected for academic research. Participation was voluntary, and responses were handled confidentially and analyzed collectively. The analysis was intended to examine psychological patterns rather than evaluate individual employees or rank participating organizations. Before statistical analysis, the dataset was reviewed for completeness, coding consistency, and alignment of the personality and happiness variables.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics summarized the study variables. Pearson product-moment correlations were used to examine bivariate relationships between each Big Five trait and happiness. A simultaneous multiple regression then entered openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism together as predictors of happiness. Statistical significance was evaluated at $p < .05$. The regression coefficients were interpreted in conjunction with the overall model and the size of explained variance; significance was not treated as evidence of causality.

RESULTS

Descriptive Findings

The mean happiness score was 119.53 (SD = 14.90). Within the personality profile, agreeableness had the highest raw mean (M = 29.35, SD = 5.07), followed by conscientiousness (M = 28.83, SD = 3.74), openness (M = 27.80, SD = 5.06), neuroticism (M = 25.10, SD = 3.77), and extraversion (M = 22.80, SD = 3.98). Because the variables have different score ranges, these raw means are descriptive of the sample and should not be interpreted as directly comparable levels across constructs or as normative classifications.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Personality Traits and Happiness

Variable	M	SD
Happiness	119.53	14.90
Openness	27.80	5.06
Conscientiousness	28.83	3.74
Extraversion	22.80	3.98
Agreeableness	29.35	5.07
Neuroticism	25.10	3.77

Note. N = 153.

Correlational Findings

The correlation pattern was selective. Agreeableness showed a positive and statistically significant relationship with happiness, r = .241, p = .003. Employees with higher agreeableness scores therefore tended to report higher happiness scores in this sample. Openness (r = .032, p = .692), conscientiousness (r = .014, p = .864), extraversion (r = .135, p = .096), and neuroticism (r = -.057, p = .485) were not significantly associated with happiness. H01 was therefore partially rejected: the null hypothesis was rejected for agreeableness and was not rejected for the remaining four traits. The non-significant results do not establish that these four associations are absent.

Table 3

Correlations between Personality Factors and Happiness

Personality factor	r	p
Openness	.032	.692
Conscientiousness	.014	.864
Extraversion	.135	.096
Agreeableness	.241	.003
Neuroticism	−.057	.485

Note. N = 153. r = Pearson correlation coefficient. Only agreeableness was statistically significantly correlated with happiness at p < .05.

REGRESSION FINDINGS

The five personality traits were entered simultaneously in a multiple regression model predicting happiness. The overall model was statistically significant, R = .272, R^2 = .074, adjusted R^2 = .043, F(5, 147) = 2.356, p = .043. The model therefore accounted for 7.4% of the observed variance in happiness. Although statistically significant, this proportion is modest and leaves 92.6% of the observed variance unexplained by the model. The analysis does not identify how much of this unexplained variance reflects other influences or measurement error. Agreeableness was the only significant unique predictor, B = .723, SE = .256, β = .246, t = 2.83, p = .005. Holding the remaining Big Five traits constant, a one-unit increase in agreeableness was associated with an estimated .723-unit increase in the happiness score. Openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and neuroticism did not make statistically significant unique contributions. H02 was therefore rejected at the model level, but the individual predictive contribution was concentrated in agreeableness.

Table 4

Multiple Regression Predicting Happiness from the Big Five Traits

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
O	.126	.235	.043	.54	.592
C	-.364	.344	-.091	−1.06	.292
E	.411	.312	.110	1.32	.190
A	.723	.256	.246	2.83	.005
N	-.003	.324	-.001	-.01	.992

Note. Outcome variable = happiness. O = Openness; C = Conscientiousness; E = Extraversion; A = Agreeableness; N = Neuroticism. R = .272, R^2 = .074, adjusted R^2 = .043, F(5, 147) = 2.356, p = .043.

DISCUSSION

Agreeableness was the only trait significantly associated with happiness both in the bivariate analysis and after controlling for the other four traits. The significant regression model explained 7.4% of happiness variance. This selective pattern supports a modest dispositional association without establishing that personality is the principal determinant of employee happiness.

The agreeableness finding is consistent with meta-analytic evidence (Anglim et al., 2020; Busseri & Erb, 2024). Cooperation, trust and interpersonal sensitivity may be useful where employees depend on colleagues for information, approvals and continuity of service. Smoother relationships could reduce friction and support well-being, although these pathways were not measured here.

Mishra et al. (2023) reported that organizational citizenship behaviour mediated links between selected personality dimensions and well-being in Indian public services. The present association is compatible with an interpersonal explanation, but it does not demonstrate citizenship behaviour or any other mediator. It remains an association between agreeableness and the happiness composite.

The non-significant extraversion and neuroticism findings differ from common meta-analytic patterns, in which extraversion and emotional stability are prominent well-being correlates (Anglim et al., 2020; Busseri & Erb, 2024; Steel et al., 2008). This does not invalidate the wider literature or establish that the traits have no relationship with happiness. The present study concerns 153 experienced employees from selected organizations; occupational context, convenience sampling and score variability may affect detectable associations.

Measurement may also explain differences. Personality associations can vary across life satisfaction, positive affect and negative affect (Tanksale, 2015; Busseri & Erb, 2024). A single Oxford Happiness Questionnaire composite may conceal component-specific patterns. The study therefore supports conclusions about overall happiness scores, rather than separate affective or cognitive dimensions.

Workplace context provides another possible interpretation. Baranski et al. (2023) demonstrated personality–environment associations with happiness among federal office workers. Formal procedures and role demands may constrain some dispositions while making cooperation particularly useful. Job stability and experience might also affect employees' responses to work demands. These explanations remain tentative because the present model did not test environmental interactions.

The unexplained 92.6% of happiness variance cannot be assigned to particular causes from this analysis. Leadership, workload, perceived support, family circumstances and measurement error are possible contributors, but their shares were not estimated. Fisher's (2010) account of workplace happiness supports considering multiple influences. The present findings establish only the modest statistical contribution of the five personality scores.

Practical interpretation should remain cautious. Agreeableness scores should not be used to rank employees by their capacity for happiness. Supportive supervision, cooperation and mentoring are possible developmental applications, discussed below, rather than interventions evaluated by this study.

Bellet et al. (2024) linked happiness with productivity gains in a field setting. This reinforces the organizational relevance of well-being, but the current study did not measure performance. Results from commercial work cannot be assumed to apply directly to public institutions, where service quality and public value involve different outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Among 153 permanent central government employees, the Big Five traits jointly predicted happiness at a statistically significant but modest level. Agreeableness was the only trait that showed both a significant bivariate relationship with happiness and a significant unique regression coefficient. Openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and neuroticism were not significantly related to happiness in this sample. The findings therefore support a selective personality-happiness relationship rather than a uniform effect of all five traits. Further study is needed to identify organizational and other personal factors associated with the remaining variation in happiness. The present findings do not establish causal effects or justify generalization to all central government employees.

LIMITATIONS

The study has several limitations. First, the sample was selected through non-probability convenience sampling from five central government organizations, and the findings cannot be treated as representative of all ministries, regions, occupational cadres, or levels of government. The organizational distribution was also unequal, with ICAR contributing the largest number of participants. Replication with stratified or probability-based samples would strengthen

generalizability. Second, the cross-sectional design prevents temporal or causal conclusions. Although the regression terminology refers to prediction, the data do not establish that personality precedes or causes happiness. Reciprocal or third-variable processes remain possible. Third, both personality and happiness were based on self-report scores, making shared method variance, social desirability, and response style possible. Fourth, the analysis used broad Big Five dimensions and a global happiness composite. Fourth, the analysis examined the five broad personality domains and an overall happiness score. It did not separately examine narrower facets within these domains or distinct components of well-being, such as life satisfaction, positive affect and negative affect which may reveal relationships that broad scores cannot detect. Finally, organizational variables that could explain or modify the personality-happiness relationship - such as leadership, perceived support, job autonomy, workload, psychological safety, work-family balance, and public service motivation - were not included in the model reported in this paper.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings support a restrained, developmental use of personality information. Agreeableness appears relevant to happiness in this sample, but the modest R^2 shows that employee well-being cannot be reduced to personality. Government organizations may benefit more from creating supportive conditions than from attempting to identify a supposedly ideal personality profile. Respectful supervision, cooperative team practices, fair treatment, recognition, mentoring, accessible counselling or well-being support, and psychologically safe communication are practical areas through which organizational climate can be improved.

Experience-based mentoring is a possible practical application that requires evaluation. Appropriately trained long-serving employees and senior Group A officers may contribute institutional knowledge, role modelling, and practical guidance to employees who experience lower work motivation or happiness. Such mentoring should be designed as a supportive developmental mechanism rather than an additional layer of control. Its purpose would be to strengthen role clarity, professional confidence, social integration, and constructive coping while preserving the autonomy and dignity of the mentee.

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