The Study of Relationship Between Triguna Personality and Depression in Young Adults

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Abstract

This research is designed to study the correlation between Triguna personality traits and Depression among young adults in the age range of 18 to 35 years via Convenience and snowball sampling methods by utilizing self-report inventories. The study delves into the concept of "Gunas", fundamental personality characteristics as per Indian Vedic philosophy, which largely shape overall behavioural patterns. The objective of this research is to examine the relationship between SRT personality factors and depression.

The study employs correlation analysis, descriptive statistics and inferential statistics to test the research hypotheses. The data is analysed using Spearman's rho correlation to determine the relationship between Triguna personality traits and depression. The Shapiro-Wilk test is used to test for multivariate normality. The findings revealed a negative correlation between depression and Satvik personality traits (Spearman rho = -0.506, p < 0.001), and positive correlations between depression and both Tamasic (Spearman rho = 0.5129, p < 0.001) and Rajasic (Spearman rho = 0.324, p < 0.001) personality traits. The mean scores for Satvik, Rajasic, and Tamasic traits were 0.409 (SD = 0.082), 0.318 (SD = 0.038), and 0.274 (SD = 0.058), respectively, while the mean score for depression was 13.513 (SD = 11.026).

Keywords : Satvik, Rajasic, Tamasic, Depression. Personality traits.

Introduction

In today's complex societies, filled with various stresses and pressures, nearly everyone experiences feelings of acute episodes of depression at some point. Emotions such as sadness, unhappiness, or disappointment are part of normal human existence and are experienced by almost everyone on a daily basis. Mental health is a significant concern worldwide, particularly for young adults. This critical transition period from adolescence to adulthood is often marked by various challenges and pressures across academic, personal, and social domains. The World Mental Health Survey, conducted among college students in 21 countries, reported that 20.3% had experienced a psychiatric disorder as per the DSM IV / CIDI criteria (Auerbach et al., 2016).

Depression, a term frequently used in social and behavioural sciences, particularly in Medical Sociology, Psychology, and Social Psychology, refers to an individual's melancholic mental state. As per the World Health Organization's 2012 report, depression is believed to impact 350 million people, making it a significant global public health concern. The report further indicates a growing global demand to manage this disease alongside other mental health conditions.

The intricate nature of depression's origins and the inconsistency in treatment outcomes necessitate a more profound understanding of its underlying mechanisms. The Triguna concept, rooted in Indian philosophy, offers a unique perspective for comprehending human personality and behaviour. The three Gunas - Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas - symbolise distinct human nature qualities and are thought to shape an individual's mental and emotional state. As per the Bhagavad Gita, these three modes of nature are inherent in existence. To attain the Nirguna State, where the three modes of nature cease to exist, one must detach from these modes. This state is primarily referred to as Moksha.

The Triguna theory, as stated by the Hindu God Shree Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita, is another important concept in Indian psychology. It refers to the three basic qualities or 'gunas' that exist in all beings: Sattva (purity, knowledge), Rajas (passion, activity), and Tamas (darkness, lethargy). In this regard, a person dominated by Rajas may be more prone to Kama (desire) and Krodha (rage), whereas a Tama-dominated individual may exhibit more Mada (pride) and Matsarya (envy). On the other hand, a person with a high level of Sattva may be able to better control these emotions. The dominance of these Gunas characterises an individual's personality. Although these Gunas are latent and not directly observable, they influence the physical, psychological, and behavioural aspects of humans. Each Guna triggers a specific quality of action, leading to personality differences among individuals.

The 'Triguna' concept, a cornerstone of Indian tradition, has garnered the interest of psychologists in India, leading to the development of indigenous theories and models of human behaviour, particularly personality. The term 'Trigunas' is a compound of two words: 'Tri', meaning three, and 'Gunas', meaning qualities. Therefore, Trigunas represent the three qualities that determine a person's state of mind, attitudes, nature, beliefs, and perceptions. The Triguna theory, a psychological model of personality, has been a subject of interest for researchers in the field of Indian psychology since the 1970s. It is primarily characterised by three key aspects: a) its inclusivity and relevance across various cultures (Wolf, 1996, 1999); b) its dynamic nature, which has been explored and confirmed by numerous studies (Anuradha & Kumar, 2015; Beena, 1990; Bhal & Debnath, 2006; Biswas, 2010; Das, 1987; Ilavarasu, Mohan & Hankey, 2017; Janghel & Shrivastav, 2016; Marutham, Balodhi & Misra, 1998; Mohan & Sandhu, 1986; Sharma, 1990); and c) its typological structure, which suggests a type-based approach to understanding personality.

It is important to highlight that these theories present a holistic perspective of personality, taking into account not just individual attributes but also the interplay of many elements such as environment, culture, and innate nature (Satpathy,2021)

Triguna and Depression

Kumar and Balodhi (2016) made an attempt to determine which of the three Gunas - Sattwa, Rajas, and Tamas - is most prevalent in patients diagnosed with depression. SRT inventory was used in selected mild to moderate depressed patients and the sample of normals, For this purpose they selected a sample size of 20 patients diagnosed with mild to moderate depression and a sample of 20 cases of normal was randomly selected from the general population, The age group included was 18-65 years. The results of the study showed dominance of rajas guna in a clinically depressed population and sattva guna in a normal population,

Also a study has shown that the Gunas such as Rajas and Tamas were the dominant ones in a clinical population suffering from conditions such as moderate depression, obsessive-compulsive disorders, and anxiety. These conditions were associated with a diminished quality of life. (Sharma, Sharma& Singh, 2012). These findings support the assertions made in Indian psychological texts, which suggest that individuals predominantly influenced by the Rajas and Tamas Gunas often exhibit characteristics such as emotional instability, despair, timidity, and a tendency to ruminate (Paranjpe & Rao,2008). Research has consistently established a link between well-being and depression. A decline in well-being, marked by low life satisfaction and happiness, is associated with an increased likelihood of depression. On the other hand, high levels of well-being, characterised by positive emotions and effective functioning, are linked to lower instances of depression. Supporting this concept, evidence suggests that for both individual and collective well-being, Sattva is the most beneficial Guna, Tamas is the least beneficial, with Rajas being intermediate.(Puta & sedlmeier, 2014) Additionally, depression has been associated with memory issues, particularly affecting short-term memory. Depression can also impact concentration and attention, leading individuals to have difficulty focusing, make careless mistakes, miss parts of conversations, lose awareness of their surroundings, and feel overwhelmed by distractions. Studies have found a positive correlation between the Sattva Guna and cognitive variables such as intelligence, short-term memory, and concentration. On the other hand, the Rajas and Tamas Gunas are negatively correlated with these cognitive variables.This suggests an indirect relationship between these Gunas and depression.(Sitamma, 2005) Positive emotions can increase resilience, allowing people to recover from stress and even reverse the detrimental consequences of negative emotions. This resistance can also serve as a defence against depressive symptoms. Positive emotions promote psychological well-being. High levels of well-being, defined by positive emotions and good functioning, have been linked to reduced levels of depression.

According to the Tri-Guna theory, those with a high Sattva level, which is associated with good emotions and mature emotional intelligence, may be less likely to suffer from depression. Their improved attention capability, a key component of emotional intelligence, may operate as a protective factor against depression (Das & Gopal, 2009), (Hopkins, 2003), (Ramarao et. al. 2014).

The study by Wolf and Abell (2003) is grounded in Vedic theory. It suggests that reciting the Hare Krishna Maha mantra can help reduce stress and depression by enhancing the Sattva, and it has a significantly greater effect on reducing stress and depression compared to the other two gunas.depression, and alcohol dependence. The research by Pandey et al. (2021) revealed that Sattvika had a positive correlation with all five elements of PERMA. On the other hand, Rajasika showed a negative correlation with the components of positive emotion, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Tamasika was found to have a negative correlation with all five components of PERMA.

This study discovered that a Tamasic personality is linked with behavioural disengagement, denial, and substance abuse. This aligns with the Tamasic qualities of mental instability, inactivity, depression, procrastination, and a sense of helplessness (Wolf, 1998). In general, the study's findings suggest that a Sattvic personality trait is advantageous as it tends to employ adaptive coping strategies. In contrast, Rajasic and Tamasic personality traits are associated with maladaptive coping styles, which can often lead to depression. These findings align with the Vedic descriptions of the Sattvic Guna, which is characterised by adaptive behaviours, emotions, and attitudes. On the other hand, Rajasic and Tamasic personality traits are marked by behaviours, emotions, and attitudes that can be detrimental (Misra and Mohanty, 2002).

A diet high in 'Tamasic Diet' can lead to feelings of tiredness, sluggishness, and dullness, which can adversely affect mental health, particularly in individuals suffering from depression or low mood. A predominance of 'Tamas' is linked to depression, while an excess of 'Rajas' is associated with anxiety and stress. In contrast, a balanced 'Sattva' is associated with improved emotional well-being (Madhuri et. al. 2023).

Individuals with a Rajasic personality are typically energetic, harsh, highly active, and bold. They are goal-oriented and exhibit aggression in achieving their objectives. These individuals tend to be self-centred and future-oriented, often displaying artificial feelings of love and affection. Their family life enjoyment is usually limited. Their preference for negative types of food can lead to health issues like hyperacidity, obesity, arthritis, diabetes, and notably, depression and anxiety. This suggests a potential link between the consumption of Rajasic food and the onset of depression (Rathore, 2020). Previous research has indicated that depression and anxiety could be contributing factors to substance dependence, including alcohol. Individuals who are dependent on alcohol often exhibit significantly high levels of neuroticism, extraversion, anxiety, and depression.

As a result, it's plausible that Tamas, which leads to negative emotions, could make an individual more susceptible to alcohol dependence. Sattva appears to be linked with overall well-being, while Rajas and Tamas are associated with mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and alcohol dependence (Salvi et al., 2012).

Objectives

1. Investigate the relationship between Triguna personality traits and depression in young adults.
2. Employ a quantitative approach with a larger sample size to provide more robust findings.
3. Explore the strength and direction of the correlation between Triguna personality traits and depression.
4. Contribute to the development of more personalized and effective therapeutic strategies for depression, considering the individual's Triguna personality.
5. Bridge the gap between Eastern and Western psychological concepts, contributing to a more holistic understanding of mental health.

Methodology

Research Design

The study uses a correlational research design to examine the relationship between Triguna Personality and Depression in young adults. The data analysis method used in this study is correlation analysis, which examines the strength and direction of the relationship between triguna Traits (Sattvic, Rajasic & Tamasic) and levels of Depression. The study used descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviation and frequencies to summarise the data. In addition, inferential statistics, such as correlation analysis were conducted to test the research hypotheses. Variables This Study's independent variable (predictor) is triguna Personality traits such as Satvic, Tamasic and Rajasic traits, while the dependent variable (outcome) is levels/severity of Depression.

Sample & Sampling Technique

The study's sample was composed of 154 participants who provided their responses through a Google form. This form was circulated via various online messaging and social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Of the total participants, 118 were aged between 18 and 25 years, while 36 were in the 26 to 35 years age range. The sample was predominantly female, with 92 females and 62 males. Furthermore, the majority of the participants were students (116), with the remaining 38 being working professionals. Sampling Method Convenience and snowball sampling methods were used, which are non-probability sampling techniques, to select the respondents for the survey. Those individuals who are readily available and willing to participate in the survey filled out the survey form (Google forms).

Data was collected for the target participant population through social media and from the Psychology & Education department as well as faculty of commerce and faculty of science of The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda as well as the other data was collected from organisations and internship start-ups. These initial participants were then asked to circulate the Google form to at least two other people fulfilling the criteria.

Inclusion Criteria

 1. Participants must be between 18-35 years of age.

2. Participants must be Indian citizens, currently residing in India.

3. Participants must be able to read and comprehend English.

Exclusion Criteria

1. People suffering from any diagnosed clinical or mental health conditions.

2. People were not wilfully consenting to participate in the study.

Tools

The tools used in this study are questionnaires, which were administered online through Google Forms. The first questionnaire was the Vedic Personality Inventory by Dr. David Wolf (1998), the three subscales of the VPI demonstrated a high degree of internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.93 to 0.94. Furthermore, every item on the VPI showed a corrected item-total correlation greater than 0.50 with its respective subscale. Additional studies have also confirmed the robust validity and reliability of the three gunas constructs.

The second questionnaire was the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) formulated by Dr. Aaron T. Beck and his team in 1961. The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) demonstrated test-retest reliability ranging from 0.73 to 0.92, indicating that the scores remain stable over time. The internal consistency of the BDI-II was measured at 0.9, suggesting that the items on the questionnaire are closely related and measure the same concept.

Procedure

The study collected quantitative data through surveys that were conducted over a period of two months (Feb to March-2024), the data was collected on an already developed and validated questionnaire of Vedic personality Inventory (wolf, 1998) and Beck's Depression Inventory (Beck et. al. 1961). The scores of above mentioned variables were collected through Google forms along with other demographic details such as Age range, gender and occupation.

After data collection, the responses were downloaded from the Google form, coded according to the scoring patterns of the respective inventories, and then imported into the JASP software (Jeffreys's Amazing Statistics Program), version 0.18.3, was used to conduct statistical tests. These tests included correlation analysis. The analysis results were then interpreted and reported in the research study, along with a discussion of their implications. Finally, conclusions were drawn, and recommendations were made for future research in this area. The analysis was carried out in accordance with the objectives of the study. JASP is an open source and user-friendly software designed for statistical analysis.

Findings

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for the Triguna traits, Depression					
	Sample	Mean	Std. Deviation	Shapiro-Wilk	P-value of Shapiro-Wilk
Satvik	154	0.409	0.082	0.956	<0.001
Rajasic	154	0.318	0.038	0.965	<0.001
Tamasic	154	0.274	0.058	0.978	0.015
Depression	154	13.513	11.026	0.918	<0.001

The table displays the mean, standard deviation, and sample size (N=154) for overall Triguna, Depression scores of participants. The mean score for Satvik traits is 0.409, standard deviation of 0.082, with Shapiro-Wilk value is 0.956 (P<0.001). For Rajasic, the mean score is 0.318, standard deviation of 0.038, with Shapiro-Wilk value is 0.965(P<0.001). Similarly, for Tamasic traits - mean score of 0.274, standard deviation of 0.058, with shapiro wilk value of 0.978. Whereas, the mean score of Depression is 13.513, with standard deviation of 11.026, Shapiro-Wilk value 0.918 (P<0.001). As P value of Shapiro- Wilk is lesser than the significant value (0.001) indicates that data is not normally distributed and non-parametric tests would be preferred and also these results provide an understanding of the central tendency, dispersion of the data, which is important in the further analysis of the relationship between Triguna and Depression.
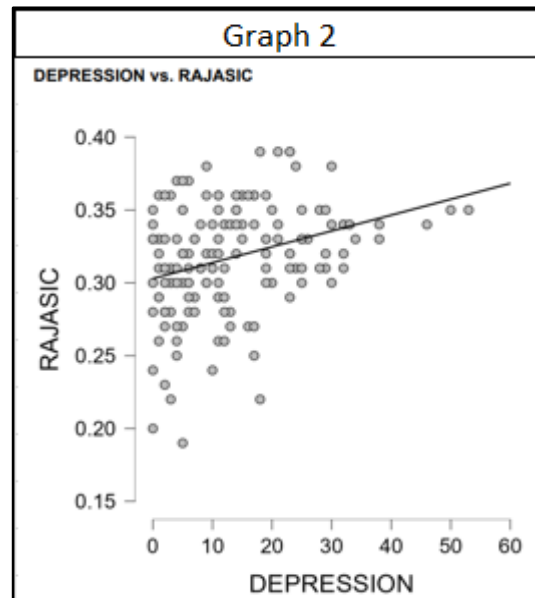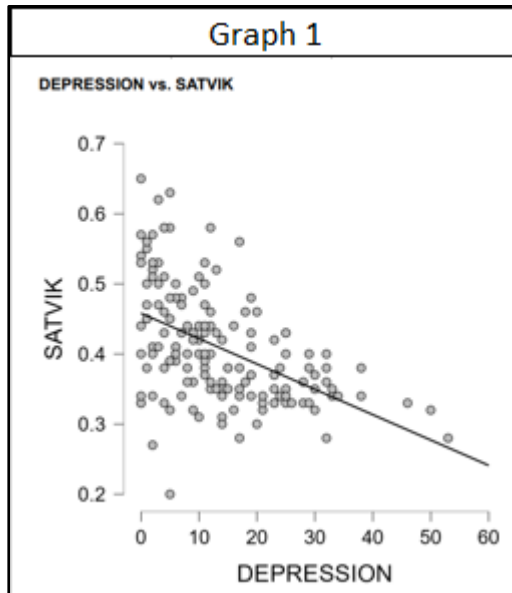
Table 2: Correlational Analysis for the Triguna traits and Depression				
Spearman's Correlation		n	Spearman's rho	P
Depression	Satvik	154	-0.506	<0.001
Depression	Rajasic	154	0.324	<0.001
Depression	Tamasic	154	0.512	<0.001
Significant P<0.001				

This table and graph displays the correlational analysis, as Mentioned above, the data was not normally distributed, so for that purpose non-parametric spearman's Rho was applied to examine the relationship between the two variables, Triguna traits with Depression. The table and Graph 1 shows the correlation between Satvik trait and Depression.

The Spearman's Rho value is -0.506 (P<0.001), indicating a negative correlation between the two variables. The P-value is less than 0.001, indicating that the correlation is statistically significant at a 99.9% confidence level. The table and Graph-2 shows the correlation between Rajasic traits and Depression. The Spearman's Rho value is 0.324 (P<0.001), indicating a Similarly, the table & Graph-3 shows the correlation between Tamasic traits and Depression. The Spearman's Rho value is 0.512 (P<0.001), indicating a positive correlation between the two variables. The P-value is less than 0.001, indicating that the correlation is statistically significant at a 99.9% confidence level.

Graph 3 — DEPRESSION vs. TAMASIC
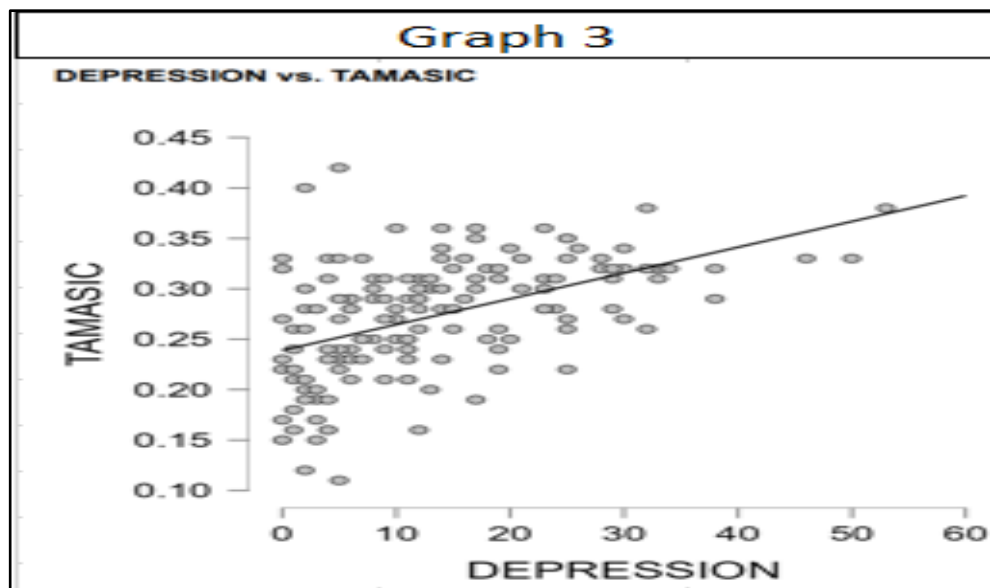
Therefore, we can conclude that there is significant positive correlation between Rajasic and Tamasic personality traits with Depression. Whereas there is significant negative correlation between Satvik and Depression.

Discussion

An individual's dominance of Satvik personality traits is inversely proportional to the severity of depression. In other words, a person with a Satvik personality is likely to have less depression, whereas an individual's dominance of Tamasic and Rajasic Personality traits is directly proportional to the severity of depression. This finding is supported by the studies of Kumar & Balodhi (2016), their research revealed that the normal population had a dominance of Satvik personality traits compared to clinically diagnosed patients with depression, who were dominated by Rajasic and Tamasic traits.

The SRT inventory was used to select patients with mild to moderate depression and a sample of normal individuals. For this purpose, a sample size of 20 patients diagnosed with mild to moderate depression and a sample of 20 normal cases were randomly selected from the general population. The age group included was 18-65 years. The results of the study showed a dominance of Rajas Guna in a clinically depressed population and Sattva Guna in a normal population. These findings underscore the importance of considering personality traits in understanding and treating depression. Also, according to the Tri-Guna theory, those with a high Sattva level, which is associated with good emotions and mature emotional intelligence, may be less likely to suffer from depression. Their improved attention capability, a key component of emotional intelligence, may operate as a protective factor against depression (Das & Gopal, 2009), (Hopkins, 2003) and (Rama Rao et. al., 2014).

According to the supportive study of Wolf and Abell (2003) Enhancing Sattva can help reduce stress and depression, and it has a significantly greater effect on reducing stress and depression compared to the other two gunas on depression.

Research by (Pandey et. al., 2021) revealed that Sattvik traits had a positive correlation with all five elements of PERMA by Seligman, M. (2018) which is closely associated with overall well-being and can be an adaptive coping mechanism in dealing with depression's affective and somatic symptoms. Also one study supports that balanced 'Sattva' is associated with improved emotional well-being (Madhuri et. al. 2023). Also a study by (Sharma et. al., 2012) has shown that the Gunas such as Rajas and Tamas were the dominant ones in a clinical population suffering from conditions such as moderate depression, obsessive-compulsive disorders, and anxiety. These findings support the assertions made in Indian psychological texts, which suggest that individuals predominantly influenced by the Rajas and Tamas Gunas often exhibit characteristics such as emotional instability, despair, timidity, and a tendency to ruminate which are significantly related with the severity of Depression (Paranjpe & Rao,2008) Also, according to study Sitamma (2005) the Rajas and Tamas Gunas are negatively correlated with cognitive variables, also suggests an indirect relationship between these Gunas and depression.

Therefore, it can be inferred that Tamas could potentially be a contributing factor to depression. Research by Rathore, (2020) suggests a potential link between the consumption of Rajasic food and the onset of depression, which also supports the notion that Rajasic traits are positively associated with depression. Similarly, Sattva appears to be linked with overall wellbeing, while Rajas and Tamas are associated with mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and alcohol dependence (Salvi et al., 2012).

Conclusion

This research has provided a comprehensive examination of the relationship between Triguna personality traits and depression among young adults. The primary research question posed was whether there is a significant relationship between these personality traits and depression. The findings have confirmed this relationship, with Satvik traits showing a negative correlation with depression, and Tamasic and Rajasic traits showing a positive correlation. The use of quantitative methods, including correlation analysis, descriptive statistics, and inferential statistics, has allowed for a rigorous examination of the research question. The use of the Vedic Personality Inventory and Beck's Depression Inventory has ensured the collection of reliable and valid data. The findings of this study have important implications for mental health professionals working with young adults, particularly in the Indian context. They highlight the potential value of incorporating an understanding of Triguna personality traits into therapeutic interventions. This could lead to the development of more effective, culturally sensitive approaches to treating depression.

As a correlational study, it does not establish causality. Future research could explore the causal mechanisms underlying the observed relationships and investigate potential moderating and mediating factors.

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