

# Relationship between Agreeableness Personality Subtype and Suicidal Behavior among Secondary School Students in Kenya

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**Abstract** The present study investigated relationship between Agreeableness personality subtype among secondary school students and suicidal behavior in Kenya. Correlation survey design was adopted for the study. The sample size was 120 secondary school students within Kitutu Central Sub-County, Kisii County, Kenya. The study used Aaron Beck suicidal inventory and Big Five Factor for Personality questionnaires. A reliability coefficient of 0.743 was reported. Permission to conduct a study was obtained from the ministry of education-Kisii County. Data was analyzed using regression analysis. The study found that the coefficient of agreeableness was significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The model summary gave  $R^2 = 0.347$ , which means that agreeableness explains 34.7% of the variation in suicidal behaviour. The ANOVA table  $F(1, 68) = 0.545$  with  $p < 0.05$  indicates that regression is a good fit for analysis of the data. The coefficients table shows that the coefficient of the constant term and the coefficient of agreeableness are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The negative coefficient shows that there is a significant negative relationship between agreeableness personality and suicidal behaviour. The Kenyan Ministry of Education to consider posting full-time teacher counsellors to schools to enable regular personality assessment.

**Keywords** Agreeableness personality subtype, Secondary school, Students' suicidal behavior, Kenya

## 1. Introduction

Suicidal behavior is against the law in Kenya. The existence of suicide phenomena in the society is a major issue that needs to be looked into with a lot of concern, and creating effective preventative measure is a matter of urgency (Wanyoike, 2015). Knowledge concerning suicide is largely limited. The majority of people in the society treat suicide cases as mental health issues. Suicide is nevertheless a private and personal act and a wide disparity exists in the rates of suicide across different countries. A greater understanding of region-specific factors related to suicide would enable prevention strategies to be more culturally sensitive. This focus is also highlighted in the September 10, 2012 World Suicide Prevention Day theme "Suicide Prevention across the Globe: Strengthening Protective Factors and Instilling Hope" (Wanyoike, 2015). This qualitative review explores the historical and immigrants, expatriates and refugees many of whom have youths enrolling in the universities. As a result the educational

institutions are over stretched on accommodating the high number of students. Among the concerns that schools have to deal with is suicidal behaviour. It has been noted that there has been an increase in suicide cases in Kenya especially in secondary schools.

Schneidman (2005) defines suicide as an intentional death, a self-inflicted death which one makes an intentional direct and conscious effort to end one's life. According to the definitions the deaths are described as self-afflicted. The definition identifies that the individuals attempt to end their life resulting in death. When the attempt does not result in death it is considered to be attempted suicide. The rates of suicide have greatly increased among youth, and youth are now the group at highest risk estimated at one-third of the population in developed and developing countries. The emerging phenomenon of "cyber-suicide" in the Internet era is a further cause for concern (Rajagopal S. 2004) also because of the use of new methods of suicide. The categories under suicide behavior should be seen in a continuum of severity, leading from ideation to the formulation of a plan, then to a suicide attempt. Consistent with this hierarchical model, individuals who experience persistent and severe suicide ideation are at a higher risk of attempting suicide (Scanlan & Purcell, 2009). While not all suicide ideation results in a suicide attempt (Reynolds, 1991), ideation is nevertheless strongly associated with depression, and with depressive feelings and cognitions. As such, sadness, loss,

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Published online at <http://journal.sapub.org/ijpbs>

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grief, guilt, fatigue, pessimism, poor concentration, anhedonia, and nihilism may be viewed as an immediate cause of suicide attempts, some of which will become completed suicides (Scanlan & Purcell, 2009).

The study was informed by Aaron Beck Suicidal Theory. The theory emphasizes that people's hopelessness has a significant role in suicidal thoughts, attempts and completion. This theory further informs the study that student's hopelessness in meeting the expected objectives, goals set by either learning institutions or parents, the society at large could significantly to the suicidal ideation, thoughts and attempts. In addition, the theory continue to state that learners previous suicidal experiences acted as a reminder to all suicidal activities, thoughts and behaviours hence they are vulnerable to engaging in attempting suicides.

Literature on the relationship between agreeableness and suicidal thoughts exists. Shokrgozar *et al* (2017) assessed the relationship between suicidal thought and personality traits in opium dependent patients who are currently on methadone maintenance therapy. There was a negative correlation between agreeableness and suicidal thoughts. Shokrgozar *et al* (2017) assessed the relationship between suicidal thought and personality traits in opium dependent patients who are currently on methadone maintenance therapy. There was a negative correlation between agreeableness and suicidal thoughts. Fergusson *et al* (2013) examined factors that influence vulnerability/resiliency of depressed young people to suicidal ideation and suicide attempt. Data were gathered during a 21-year longitudinal study of a birth cohort of 1265 New Zealand young people. The findings reported a negative relationship between agreeableness personality trait and suicidal attempts. Obi *et al* (2013) study investigated the influence of personality and age on attitude towards crime among adolescents in Jos, Nigeria. Cross Sectional Survey research design was adopted while multiple linear Regressions was applied as a statistical test to analyze the data. The results were that agreeableness was positively associated towards crime.

Marc *et al* (2018) aimed to contribute to fill this gap in investigating the relationship between personality as conceptualized by the Five-Factor Model, the IPTS constructs, and a dimensional measure of current suicidal ideation. The findings indicated that lower agreeableness was a predictor of the acquired capability for suicide. However, none of the models involving path analyses with IPTS variables as mediators of the relationship between personality traits and suicidal ideation was adequately adjusted to the data. Sarchiapone, *et al* (2019) study investigated psychological characteristics that may predict suicide ideation and behaviour in male prisoners in Italy. Multivariate logistic regression was designed to test them as predictors of suicidal ideation and attempt. The findings indicated that ideators and attempters scored higher on

scales measuring aggression, hostility, childhood trauma, depression, agreeableness, when compared to non-ideators and non-attempters.

According to Muiru, Thinguri and Macharia (2014) showed that family history had a significant contribution to youth and adults suicidal ideation and attempts in Kenya. Ongwae (2015) study in Bomet Central-Sub County of Kenya revealed that the most common methods of suicide were: use of poison, landlessness, land disputes, domestic conflicts alcoholism, irresponsible families, family violence and terminal illness. In addition, Njagi, Mwanja, Manyasi and Mwaura (2017) study showed that parenting styles have a positive and a significant prediction for the risky sexual behaviours among the secondary school students and that parenting styles account for 57.2% ( $R^2 = 0.572$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) of secondary school students risky sexual behaviour.

The hypotheses tested was stated as follows: *There is no significant relationship between Agreeableness Personality Subtype and Suicidal Behavior among Secondary School Students in Kenya.*

## 2. Research Methodology

The correlation survey design was adopted in the study. The target population was 6284 secondary school students drawn from Kitutu Central, Kisii County, Kenya. The Sample size was 120 students drawn from boys and girls boarding, and mixed secondary schools in the ratio of 60% (72) and girls 40% (48) this was due to the fact that both girls were involved in suicidal behaviours. The students were in the age bracket of 14-18 years and were selected using stratified random sampling technique. The study used Aaron Beck Suicidal Inventory and Lewis Big Five Factor for Personality questionnaires to collect data. A reliability coefficient of 0.743 was obtained using cronbach alpha method. The data collected was analyzed using regression analysis with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0. The findings were presented using frequencies, tables, standard deviations, mean differences and percentages. Linear regression analysis was used to test the research hypothesis of the study.

## 3. Findings & Discussions

To assess the Agreeableness Personality Sub-Type, students were asked to give their opinion on the following statements related to agreeableness personality subtype. The student respondents were given five scaled statements of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. They were to rate the statements on that scale based on their opinion and their responses were put in percentages as tabulated in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Agreeableness Personality Subtype

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	STD
Tends to find fault with others	10 (14.3)	9 (12.9)	6 (8.6)	20 (28.6)	25 (35.7)	3.586	1.450
Is helpful and unselfish with others	34 (48.6)	24 (34.3)	5 (7.1)	3 (4.3)	4 (5.7)	4.157	1.112
Starts quarrels with others	13 (18.6)	3 (4.3)	3 (4.3)	16 (22.9)	35 (50.0)	3.814	1.544
Has a forgiving nature	35 (50.0)	17 (24.3)	7 (10.0)	6 (8.6)	5 (7.1)	4.014	1.268
Is generally trusting	28 (40.0)	19 (27.1)	15 (21.4)	4 (5.7)	4 (5.7)	3.900	1.169
Can be cold and aloof	4	5	30	17	14	3.457	1.073

The descriptive analysis presented in the Table 1 indicated that on the test to find fault with others, 45 (65.3%) disagreed while only 19 (27.2%) agreed with the statement. In addition, on being helpful to others, 58 (82.9%) agreed while only 7 (10%) disagreed. On the statement on being forgiving in nature, 52 (74.3%) agreed while only 11 (15.7%) disagreed. On the statement of trusting others, 47 (67.1%) agreed while only 8 (11.4%) disagreed. This finding agrees with Shokrgozar *et al* (2017) who assessed the relationship between suicidal thought and personality traits in opium dependent patients who are currently on methadone maintenance therapy. There was a negative correlation between agreeableness and suicidal thoughts. Similarly, Shokrgozar *et al* (2017) assessed the relationship between suicidal thought and personality traits in opium dependent

patients who are currently on methadone maintenance therapy. There was a negative correlation between agreeableness and suicidal thoughts.

To assess the relationship between agreeableness personality subtype among secondary school students and suicidal behavior, the null hypothesis was stated as follows:

**Hypothesis:** *There is no significant relationship between agreeableness personality subtype and suicidal behavior among secondary school students in Kenya.*

The aggregates of the predictor variables (agreeableness personality) were measured and linear regression was run using the aggregate of the independent variables (predictor) and the aggregate of suicidal behavior as the dependent variable. The findings are presented Table 2

**Table 2.** Regression Model Summary Output for Effect of Agreeableness Personality Subtype on Suicidal Behaviour

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.589 <sup>a</sup>	.347	.323	7.102		
ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	27.500	1	27.500	.545	.013 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	3429.643	68	50.436		
	Total	3457.143	69			
Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	10.870	4.737		2.295	.025
	Agreeableness	-.100	.135	-.089	-.738	.046

a. Dependent Variable: Suicidal Behaviour

b. Predictors: (Constant), Agreeableness

The study found that the coefficient of agreeableness was significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The model summary gave  $R^2 = 0.347$ , which means that agreeableness explains 34.7% of the variation in suicidal behaviour. The ANOVA table  $F(1, 68) = 0.545$  with  $p < 0.05$  indicates that regression is a good fit for analysis of the data. The coefficients table shows that

the coefficient of the constant term and the coefficient of agreeableness are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The negative coefficient shows that there is a negative relationship between agreeableness personality and suicidal behaviour. Thus the model equation becomes;

$$\text{where; } Y = 10.870 - 0.100X$$

$\hat{Y}$  is Suicidal Behavior and  
X is Agreeableness

The regression coefficient was statistically significant ( $t=-0.738$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Thus, improving agreeableness personality reduces chances of suicidal behavior among students. The findings concur with those of Fergusson et al (2013) findings who reported a negative relationship between agreeableness personality trait and suicidal attempts. Obi et al (2013) study results were that agreeableness was positively associated towards crime. Marc et al (2018) indicated that lower agreeableness was a predictor of the acquired capability for suicide. However, none of the models involving path analyses with IPTS variables as mediators of the relationship between personality traits and suicidal ideation was adequately adjusted to the data.

#### 4. Conclusions & Recommendations

The study found that the coefficient of agreeableness was significant ( $p<0.05$ ). The model summary gave  $R^2=0.347$ , which means that agreeableness explains 34.7% of the variation in suicidal behaviour. The coefficients table shows that the coefficient of the constant term and the coefficient of agreeableness are statistically significant ( $p<0.05$ ). The negative coefficient shows that there is a negative relationship between agreeableness personality and suicidal behaviour. The Kenyan Ministry of Education to consider posting full-time teacher counsellors to schools for regular personality assessment for learners who are at risk of suicide.

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Cambridge University Press DOI:  
10.1017/S0033291702006748.