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Article

Impact of Personality Traits on Thrill Seeking Behavior Among Adolescents Adventure Travelers

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the impact of personality traits on thrill seeking behavior among adolescent adventure travelers in Pakistan. A sample of 1,600 participants (800 males and 800 females) was recruited from various adventure clubs operating in the capital city, representing a diverse adolescent population. Data were collected using the Big Five Inventory (BFI-44) and the Sensation Seeking Scale (SSS Form V). Using Jamovi correlational analysis indicated that neuroticism was negatively associated with thrill seeking, whereas extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness showed positive associations. Independent samples t-tests revealed that male participants scored significantly higher than females on agreeableness, conscientiousness, and thrill seeking. Age-based comparisons further indicated that individuals aged 22–30 scored higher on neuroticism. Multiple regression analysis demonstrated that personality traits collectively accounted for 30% of the variance in thrill seeking, suggesting a higher predictive effect. These findings underscore the relevance of personality dimensions in understanding risk-oriented behaviors among adolescent adventure travelers and highlight potential implications for targeted engagement strategies in youth adventure tourism and behavioral research.

Keywords: adolescents; thrill-seeking; personality traits; openness to experience; neuroticism; extroversion; agreeableness; conscientiousness; adventure travelers

Introduction

With digital technology and evolving social media platforms, thrill seeking behavior has taken increasingly alarming forms. Risk-taking is now often mediated online, driven by both stimulation and social validation. Acts like dangerous selfies, streaming self-harm, or filming emergencies rather than helping reflect a disturbing link between risk and attention. These behaviors signal a broader psychosocial trend where digital recognition outweighs safety or ethics. Linked to impulsivity, emotional dysregulation, and peer reinforcement, such behaviors pose serious public health concerns. The normalization of harmful content demands urgent attention from mental health professionals and policymakers, framing digital-age thrill seeking as a critical psychosocial risk.

Adolescence is a critical developmental period marked by heightened emotional reactivity, identity exploration, and a propensity for risk-taking behaviours. Among these, thrill seeking is a tendency to pursue novel, intense, and potentially dangerous experiences stands out as both a hallmark of adolescent behaviour and a potential precursor to various health-compromising outcomes. While environmental influences such as peer pressure and media exposure, excessive social media usage are well-documented contributors, growing evidence highlights the significant role of stable personality traits in shaping such behaviour.

Personality dimensions like extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, and impulsivity have been closely linked to risk-oriented tendencies. Thrill seeking, as a component of sensation seeking, is particularly influenced by traits associated with arousal regulation and reward sensitivity. However, the extent to which these traits predict thrill seeking during adolescence is a time of ongoing neurobiological and psychological change—remains an area requiring deeper empirical scrutiny (Kiatkawsin et al., 2021).

This study aims to explore the relationship between core personality traits and thrill-seeking behavior in adolescents, offering insights into how individual psychological predispositions may influence engagement in high-risk activities. Understanding these associations is essential not only for identifying at-risk youth but also for designing targeted interventions that align with their underlying personality profiles.

Literature Review

The current literature review synthesizes current research on the interplay between personality traits and thrill seeking in adolescents, providing a foundation for further study and practical application in educational and clinical settings.

Adolescence is a developmental period characterized by increased exploration, identity formation, and a propensity for risk-taking behaviors. Thrill seeking, defined as the pursuit of novel and intense experiences, often manifests during this stage and is influenced by various personality traits. Understanding the relationship between personality dimensions and thrill seeking in adolescents is crucial for developing targeted interventions to mitigate potential negative outcomes (Fernández-Teruel, 2021; Lee et al., 2024).

Sensation seeking, refers to the need for varied, novel, and complex sensations and experiences, and the willingness to take physical and social risks for such experiences. This trait is particularly salient during adolescence, a period marked by neurobiological changes that heighten the desire for novel stimuli. Research indicates that high sensation seekers are more likely to engage in behaviours such as extreme sports, substance use, and unprotected sex, highlighting the link between this personality trait and thrill seeking (Li et al., 2021).

The Five-Factor Model (FFM) of personality comprising openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism provides a framework for examining individual differences in thrill seeking behavior (Pešić et al., 2023). The models include openness to experience that is individuals high in openness are characterized by imagination, curiosity, and a preference for novelty. This trait has been positively associated with sensation seeking, suggesting that adolescents who are more open to experience may be more inclined toward thrill seeking activities (Lau et al., 2023). Conscientiousness reflects self-discipline, organization, and goal-directed behavior. Lower levels of conscientiousness have been linked to higher risk-taking and thrill seeking, as less conscientious individuals may exhibit poorer impulse control and foresight (Rumbold et al., 2021). Extraversion refers to sociable, energetic, and assertive. They tend to seek out stimulation and are more likely to engage in thrill seeking behaviours, driven by their need for excitement and social engagement (Naz et al., 2025). Agreeableness involves being compassionate and cooperative. Lower agreeableness has been associated with higher risk-taking, possibly due to a reduced concern for social norms and the well-being of others (Smirni et al., 2023); and Neuroticism characterized by emotional instability and negative emotions, neuroticism has a complex relationship with thrill seeking. Some studies suggest that high neuroticism may lead to avoidance of risk due to anxiety, while others indicate that it may drive individuals toward thrill seeking as a coping mechanism (Vasiljević & Lavbič, 2023).

The research also shows that impulsivity as the tendency to act without forethought, is another personality trait closely linked to thrill seeking. Adolescents with high impulsivity are more prone to engage in risky behaviors without considering the consequences. This trait often co-occurs with sensation seeking, compounding the likelihood of thrill-seeking behavior (Sârbescu & Rusu, 2021). Like comorbid situations, neurological underpinnings illustrate that adolescent brain undergoes

significant development, particularly in regions associated with reward processing and executive function. The imbalance between a heightened sensitivity to rewards and an underdeveloped capacity for impulse control contributes to increased thrill seeking during adolescence. Neuroimaging studies have shown that high sensation seekers exhibit greater activation in the mesolimbic dopamine system, which is involved in reward anticipation and processing (Di Carlo et al., 2024; Fernández-Teruel, 2021).

Moreover, gender differences have been observed in thrill seeking behavior, with males generally exhibiting higher levels of sensation seeking than females. This disparity may be attributed to both biological factors, such as hormonal influences, and socialization processes that encourage risk-taking in males. However, it's important to note that these differences are averages and individual variation is considerable (Escelsior et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2024).

Previous research also highlights the significant importance of environmental clue and forces that contributes to thrill seeking behavior. Peer influence is particularly potent during adolescence, with individuals often engaging in risky behaviors to gain social acceptance. Family dynamics, socioeconomic status, and cultural norms further shape the expression of thrill seeking behaviors (Blum et al., 2023).

Despite extensive research on thrill seeking and personality traits across various cultures and populations, there remains a notable gap in understanding these dynamics within indigenous or underrepresented communities, such as adventure travelers in Pakistan. The rising popularity of adventure tourism in the region underscores the urgency of such research. Exploring how personality traits influence adventure choices among Pakistani youth could provide culturally relevant insights into behavior, risk assessment, and personal motivations. This would not only inform tourism marketing and product design but also aid in developing interventions that support healthy risk-taking. Moreover, understanding the dispositional factors behind adventure preferences can help adventure companies anticipate client behavior and safety needs. By integrating cultural context into psychological models, future studies could expand the scope and applicability of personality-based research. Ultimately, such localized exploration enhances our global understanding of how personality and thrill seeking interact, making room for more nuanced, inclusive, and effective psychological and behavioral interventions (Heidari et al., 2023; Lau et al., 2023).

To boot, understanding the personality correlates of thrill seeking can inform prevention and intervention efforts. Programs that enhance self-regulation, promote healthy risk-taking alternatives, and address peer influence can be effective. Tailoring interventions to individual personality profiles may increase their efficacy. Nevertheless, thrill seeking behavior in adolescents is multifaceted, influenced by a constellation of personality traits, neurobiological development, and environmental factors. Sensation seeking, impulsivity, and certain dimensions of the Big Five personality traits are consistently associated with a higher propensity for thrill seeking. Recognizing these associations is crucial for developing targeted strategies to mitigate potential negative outcomes associated with high-risk behaviors during adolescence (Heidari et al., 2023; Squillaci & Benoit, 2021).

Therefore, the objective of the current study is to identify the predictive effect of personality traits on thrill seeking among adolescent adventure travellers, and to explore relationship between the demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, program, social economic status, marital status, and family structure) on personality traits and thrill seeking.

Methodology

The present study sample was selected based on purposive sampling; the sample comprises of 1600 participants who are part of adventure clubs of capital city of Pakistan. Data was collected in two categories male ($n=800$) and female ($n=800$); Age ranged from 18yrs-30yrs Males $M_{age}=24$, and Females $M_{age}=22.5$; Educational level ranged from BS (16 yrs of education) to PhD (20 years of education) with or without work experience.

Big Five Inventory (BFI-44)

The Big Five Inventory (BFI-44) is a widely used self-report questionnaire designed to assess the five core dimensions of personality: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience. Comprising 44 items, the scale asks respondents to rate statements on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Each trait is measured through 8 to 10 items, with several items reverse-scored to control for response bias—for example, statements like “I am someone who is reserved” are reverse-coded for extraversion. The BFI-44 has demonstrated strong internal reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha values typically ranging from 0.74 to 0.88 across traits. It operationalizes personality traits as continuous variables, allowing for nuanced assessment of individual differences. The scale is concise yet comprehensive, making it suitable for use in psychological research, education, health, and organizational settings. Its strong psychometric properties and ease of administration contribute to its widespread adoption across diverse populations and cultural contexts (Yu et al., 2024).

Sensation Seeking Scale Form V

The Sensation Seeking Scale Form V (SSS-V), developed by Marvin Zuckerman, is a 40-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure an individual’s tendency to seek novel, varied, complex, and intense experiences, along with a willingness to take risks for the sake of such experiences. The scale is divided into four subscales, each comprising 10 items: Thrill and Adventure Seeking (TAS), which assesses the desire for physically risky activities like skydiving or motorcycling; Experience Seeking (ES), which reflects a preference for new ideas, art, music, and unconventional lifestyles; Disinhibition (DIS), which captures tendencies toward impulsive behaviors such as partying, drinking, and sexual variety; and Boredom Susceptibility (BS), which measures aversion to routine or repetitive tasks. The SSS-V uses a forced-choice format, where participants must select one of two contrasting statements, eliminating the need for reverse scoring. The total score is calculated by summing high sensation-seeking responses across all items, with higher scores indicating stronger sensation-seeking tendencies. The scale has shown good internal reliability, with overall Cronbach’s alpha typically above 0.80. Widely used in psychology, health, and behavioral research, the SSS-V helps identify individuals more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors or seek intense stimulation, making it valuable in both clinical and applied settings (SĂLCEANU et al., 2024).

Results

The data was analysed using JAMOVI to identify the relationship between personality traits and thrill seeking among adolescent adventures travellers. The analysis plan was divided into three steps: (a) examination of correlations between the two scales as suggested by the reliability analysis (b) mean differences between gender and age (c) predictive effect of personality traits on sensation seeking among the adolescent adventure travellers.

Table 1 shows the correlation analysis among the variables. Neuroticism is negatively correlated with all the variables.

Table 1. Correlation between big five inventory scale (extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness to experience) and sensation seeking (N= 1600).

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Extroversion	1	.23	.26**	-.25**	.15**	.23**
2 Agreeableness		1	.30**	-.25**	.30**	.20**
3 Conscientiousness			1	-.29**	.37**	.24**
4 Neuroticism				1	-.34**	-.26**
5 Openness to experience					1	.8
6 thrill Seeking						1

Note.1= Extroversion, 2= Agreeableness, 3=Conscientiousness, 4=Neuroticism, 5= Openness to experience, 6= thrill Seeking; *p<0.05, **p<0.01.

Table 2 shows the small effect sizes across the gender using *t*-test. Openness to experience and thrill seeking is significant across the gender and is higher among males than females.

Table 2. Mean, Standard Deviation, *t* value on BFI-44 and Sensation Seeking Scale among male and female adventures traveler (N= 1600).

Variables	Males (<i>n</i> = 800)		Females (<i>n</i> =800)				95% CI		Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
1	25.87	4.38	25.07	3.79	1.46	0.5	24.8	26.04	0.19
2	30.68	5.12	28.93	4.39	1.53	0.3	29.13	30.48	0.36
3	29.02	5.32	28.32	3.93	1.26	0.4	28.01	29.32	0.14
4	23.12	4.67	23.78	4.38	1.99	0.12	22.81	24.08	0.14
5	33.16	5.27	33.06	4.62	1.78	0.002	32.42	33.79	0.02
6	57.10	5.06	56.66	4.25	2.22	0.02	56.22	57.53	0.09

*Note.*1= Extroversion, 2= Agreeableness, 3=Conscientiousness, 4=Neuroticism, 5= Openness to experience, 6= thrill Seeking; CI= Confidence Interval, LL = Lower Limit, UP= Upper Limit. **p*<0.05, ***p*<0.01.

This table suggests that age plays a meaningful role in shaping personality traits and thrill-seeking behavior. The younger group (18–20 years) is generally more extraverted, conscientious, open to experience, and thrill seeking, while the older group (22–30 years) tends to be slightly more neurotic.

Table 3. Mean, standard deviation, *F*- value of age difference on all variables (N= 1600).

Variables	18-20 Years (<i>n</i> = 520)		22-30 Years (<i>n</i> = 1080)		<i>F</i>	<i>η</i> ²
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
1	25.87	3.99	25.58	4.16	7.33	.23
2	29.88	4.83	29.85	4.85	10.05	.33
3	29.60	3.86	28.70	5.04	8.02	.34
4	22.80	4.44	23.76	4.56	9.98	0.34
5	34.96	4.54	33.17	5.14	12.07	.44
6	57.91	4.42	56.91	4.80	12.01	.45

*Note.*1= Extroversion, 2= Agreeableness, 3=Conscientiousness, 4=Neuroticism, 5= Openness to experience, 6= thrill Seeking; **p*<0.05, ***p*<0.01.

Table 4 shows that 30% of the total variation in the Thrill seeking is explained by the combined influence of all the independent variables included in the model. The overall regression model is statistically significant, meaning the set of predictors reliably explains variation in thrill seeking.

Table 4. Multiple regression analysis to test relationship between personality traits and sensation seeking (N=1600).

Variables	β	Thrill Seeking	
		Model 1	
		95% CI	
1	-.17	[-.35, -.02]	
2	.19	[-.05, .23]	
3	.10	[-.04, .26]	
4	.14	[-.10, .19]	
5	.13	[-.11, .17]	
R ²		0.30	

F	12.99
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Note.1= Extroversion, 2= Agreeableness, 3=Conscientiousness, 4=Neuroticism, 5= Openness to experience, 6= thrill Seeking; * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$.

Discussion

The current research was conducted to identify the associations between personality traits and thrill-seeking behavior among the adolescent adventure travelers. The correlation matrix reveals several meaningful relationships between personality traits and thrill-seeking behavior, consistent with existing psychological literature. Most notably, openness to experience shows a very strong positive correlation with thrill seeking ($r = .80$), indicating that individuals who are curious, imaginative, and open to new experiences are significantly more likely to engage in adventurous or risk-related activities. This aligns with Zuckerman’s (2007) findings that sensation seeking is closely tied to cognitive and experiential openness (Zuckerman, 2008). Additionally, extraversion and conscientiousness also show moderate positive correlations with thrill seeking ($r = .23$ and $r = .24$, respectively), suggesting that socially outgoing and organized individuals may pursue thrill in structured or goal-driven ways, which supports earlier work by Akhtar and Malik (2023) on personality predictors of risk behavior (Akhtar & Malik, 2023). Conversely, neuroticism demonstrates a negative correlation with thrill seeking ($r = -.26$), consistent with findings by Eysenck and Eysenck (1985) that emotionally unstable individuals may avoid high-stimulation or unpredictable environments due to heightened sensitivity to stress. The pattern of correlations collectively underscores the role of stable personality traits in shaping individual differences in thrill seeking tendencies, reinforcing the importance of considering personality frameworks when examining behavioral risk and exploration during emerging adulthood (Eysenck et al., 1985; Gardner, 2020).

The present gender comparison revealed no meaningful differences across the Big Five personality traits, with only trivial differences observed in thrill seeking and openness to experience, where males scored slightly higher. Although thrill seeking reached statistical significance ($p = 0.02$), the effect size was negligible (Cohen’s $d = 0.09$), suggesting minimal practical difference. These findings align with prior meta-analytic work by Cross et al. (2011)(Cross et al., 2011), which reported that while men tend to exhibit slightly higher sensation-seeking behavior, the gender gap is narrowing, especially in younger populations. Similarly, the minimal difference in openness is consistent with Costa, Terracciano, and McCrae (2001) (Costa Jr et al., 2001), who found gender differences in personality traits to be small and often culturally dependent. The lack of significant differences in traits such as neuroticism or conscientiousness, which have sometimes shown gender-based variability in past research, suggests that gender may no longer be a strong predictor of personality differences in modern, more egalitarian samples. Overall, while statistical significance was observed in some variables, the practical implications are limited, reinforcing the importance of interpreting effect sizes alongside p-values in psychological research.

The present findings also highlight significant age-related differences across the Big Five personality traits and thrill-seeking behavior, aligning with previous research on developmental changes in personality during emerging adulthood. Specifically, individuals aged 18–20 demonstrated higher levels of extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and thrill seeking compared (Van Dijk et al., 2020) to those aged 22–30. These results are consistent with longitudinal studies suggesting that younger individuals tend to score higher on traits associated with novelty seeking and exploratory behavior The heightened thrill seeking in the younger group also supports Zuckerman’s (2007) theory that sensation seeking peaks in late adolescence and early adulthood, driven by increased dopaminergic activity and a still-developing prefrontal cortex. The moderate to large effect sizes for openness and thrill seeking ($\eta^2 = .44$ and $.45$, respectively) underscore the developmental sensitivity of these traits, particularly in relation to autonomy and identity formation during late adolescence (Zuckerman, 2008).

Conversely, the older age group (22–30 years) exhibited higher levels of neuroticism, which may reflect increased exposure to adult stressors such as career pressure, relationship instability, or

financial responsibilities. This pattern is in line with findings from Soto et al. (2011)(Soto et al., 2011), who observed a slight increase in neuroticism during early adulthood, particularly among individuals navigating life transitions. The observed differences in agreeableness, despite minimal variation in means, may be influenced by sample size effects or deviations from normal distribution, and warrant cautious interpretation. Overall, the results suggest that age plays a significant role in shaping personality expression and risk-related tendencies. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on personality development and reinforce the need for age-specific psychological and behavioural interventions, particularly for younger individuals with elevated openness and thrill-seeking tendencies.

Similarly, the multiple regression analysis revealed that among the Big Five personality traits, only extraversion significantly predicted thrill seeking, and interestingly, the relationship was negative ($\beta = -.17$, 95% CI $[-.35, -.20]$), suggesting that higher levels of extraversion were associated with lower thrill seeking in this sample. This finding contrasts with previous research, which has consistently linked extraversion to higher sensation seeking and risk-taking behaviors (Zuckerman, 2007; Akhtar & Malik, 2023). The absence of significant effects for openness to experience, neuroticism, and conscientiousness is also unexpected, particularly given the strong theoretical and empirical links between openness and exploratory, risk-related behaviors (McCrae & Costa, 1997). Although the overall model explained a moderate proportion of variance in thrill seeking ($R^2 = 0.30$), the lack of statistically significant predictors beyond extraversion may suggest sample-specific patterns or measurement limitations. It is possible that cultural or contextual factors may have shaped these relationships differently compared to Western samples where much of the prior research has been conducted. These results highlight the need for more nuanced, cross-cultural investigations into how personality dimensions relate to thrill seeking across diverse populations.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of personality traits on thrill seeking behavior among adolescent adventure travelers, using the Big Five personality framework. While the overall regression model accounted for a moderate portion of variance in thrill seeking ($R^2 = .30$), only extraversion emerged as a statistically significant predictor—and contrary to theoretical expectations, it showed a negative association. Correlational analyses revealed strong positive relationships between thrill seeking and openness to experience, as well as modest associations with extraversion and conscientiousness, supporting existing literature on sensation seeking tendencies. Gender and age comparisons further suggested slight differences in thrill seeking and personality traits, though most effect sizes were small. Taken together, the findings suggest that while personality traits do play a role in shaping thrill seeking behavior, the relationships may be more complex, potentially influenced by contextual or cultural factors specific to adolescent adventure travellers. These insights underscore the importance of considering personality profiles in adventure tourism and youth risk behavior research, while also calling for further exploration across diverse populations.

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