



## PERSONALITY ATTRIBUTES OF MALAYSIAN YOUTH: AGE DIFFERENCES IN BIG FIVE DOMAINS FROM 15 TO 39

Hari Krishnan Andi<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

*The present study investigated age and gender differences in Big Five in a Malay speaking Malaysian youth (N=1036). Participants ranging in age from 15 to 39 years completed Big Five Inventory (BFI). Age differences were found suggesting that mean levels of Neuroticism are negatively associated with age, whereas Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Extraversion are positively associated. Openness to experience demonstrated a curvilinear associated with age with highest mean levels in middle age of the youth and for female is great drops in the mean levels as they reach pre adulthood stage. Gender differences were found suggesting that male in average have higher level of Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Extraversion, while female found were to Neuroticism. Openness to experience factor, men are more positive throughout their life.*

**Key Words:** Big Five, age differences, gender, youth

### INTRODUCTION

How does the personality of Malaysian youth? Based on the Malaysian Youth Council's definition on their youth, the personality attributes of the Malaysian youth needs to be evaluated. Furthermore this study will give a correct picture of the personality attributes that the Malaysian youth have; whether theirs is universal or there is a unique pattern. On top of that Malaysia in large depend on their youth in the wellbeing of the country as well as in continuity of Malaysian independence and sovereignty, hence this study is crucial. The organization of many specific traits in terms of the five factors of Conscientiousness (C), Agreeableness (A), Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E) and Openness to experience (O) is known as the Big Five. Conscientiousness is seen in organization, punctuality, and purposefulness. Agreeableness is characterized by trust, compassion, and modesty. Individuals who are high in N are likely to be anxious, easily depressed, and irritable, whereas those who are low in N are calm, even-tempered, and emotionally stable. Extraverts are lively,

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Education & Human Development Sultan Idris Education University

E-mail: [hari.hk14@gmail.com](mailto:hari.hk14@gmail.com)

cheerful, and sociable; introverts are sober and taciturn. Open men and women are curious, original, and artistic; closed people are conventional and down-to-earth.

### **AGE DIFFERENCE IN BIG FIVE**

Youth are periods of rapid changes in terms of biological, social and psychological. Psychologically youths work to establish coherent identities and develop more complex, abstract and better differentiated self concepts (Soto, John, Gosling and Potter, 2008). These changes are proven to have implications to the traits of the personality and previous researchers have shown that youths can provide reliable and valid Big Five self-reports (Soto, John, Gosling and Potter, 2011).

Although generally the scenario is age trend changes decreases in Neuroticism, Extraversion and Openness to experience and increases in Agreeableness and Conscientiousness and accepted as an universal norm (McCrae, 2009) but findings from the available studies often conflicts with one another (Klimstra, Hale, Raaijmakers, Branje, and Meeus, 2009). For example, the study of Allemand, Zimprich and Hendricks (2008) indicate a positive age trends for Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, Neuroticism shows a negative trend and Extraversion and Openness to experience show flat trends. Branje, van Lieshout and Gerris (2007) stated a positive age trends for Openness to experience whereby De Fruyt, Bartels, van Leeuwen, De Clercq, Decuyper and Mervielde (2006) founds a negative trends. Findings for the other four domains; Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion and Neuroticism have been less consistent. Soto et al., (2011) found positive trends for mean levels of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. Neuroticism showed a negative trend while Extraversion showed flat trends. Analysis of Openness to experience revealed a positive age trend.

### **GENDER DIFFERENCES IN BIG FIVE**

Although McCrae (2009) stated that gender differences are universal, and may be biologically based and however, that the differences are relatively small compared to variation within each gender. Studies on gender differences in personality traits in adolescence reported modest effects with partly inconsistent results across studies (Soto et al, 2011).

Costa, Terracciano, and McCrae (2001), summarized biological might explain gender differences in personality traits whereby biological theories point to hormonal differences and their effects on mood and personality, and to sex-linked differences in genetic predispositions to psychopathology. Furthermore Costa et al (2001) also found evidence for socio-cultural differences in the magnitude of gender differences. One might expect that gender differences would be minimized in modern progressive cultures like Netherland and maximized in traditional cultures like South Korea.

It is understood that evolutionary psychology implies that gender differences are originated through a causal process of sexual selection. Both the men and the women differ, in this view, in domains in which they have faced different adaptive problems over human evolutionary history. In contrast, the socio-cultural model of gender differences posits that social and cultural factors directly produce gender differences in personality traits (Soto et al, 2008). Hence, integrating social and biological approaches indicated that genetic personality predispositions of men and women are sensitive to certain contextual factors (e.g., environmental stress) in ways that differentially activate or suppress these predispositions (Soto et al, 2011).

Thus, generally women tend to score higher on Neuroticism and Agreeableness, whereas gender differences in the other Big Five traits have been either inconsistent or of negligible magnitude. Costa et al (2001) had examined samples from 26 cultures and concluded that in the United States, women typically score somewhat higher than men on both Neuroticism and Agreeableness, as well as some moderately on Extraversion and Openness to experience. Men also score moderately on Extraversion and Openness to experience. There are few gender differences in Conscientiousness.

## **MALAYSIAN YOUTH**

Historically, the importance of the youth was not taken as seriously given the social and developmental stereotypes attached to youth. Too often, the talents and insights by youth were, and sometimes still are, overlooked by adults who consider the realm of youth-centred work to be that of “adults”. However, today, a shift has emerged in which youth are being given a platform to contribute given the fundamental recognition that they are in essence the future. Youth is certainly an important and valid element in national development. The Malaysian youth have a critical role to play in the country’s effort to achieve the status of a fully developed country by the year 2020. Malaysia’s development plan -Vision 2020, aims to develop all aspects of the country including national unity, social cohesion, economy, social justice, political stability, and system of government, quality of life, social and spiritual values and national pride and confidence. In order to pave the way towards a developed-nation status, Malaysia is turning its focus to address youth as a human capital where human capital is recognized as an important factor that will determine Malaysia’s success in becoming a developed nation.

Although youth are “defined demographically as those humans between the ages of 15 to 25” (Gidley and Inayatullah, 2002), definition can vary globally. According to United Nations Generally Assembly (2006), youth are classified as “those persons falling between the ages of 15 to 24 year inclusive”. The World Bank (2006) defines youth as a “time in a person’s life between childhood and adulthood...who are between the ages of 15 to 25”. The Commonwealth Youth Programme works with youth who are aged of 15 to 29 (The Commonwealth, 2010). Malaysia, via the National Youth Policy 1997 defines youth as those persons between the ages of 15 to 39 years old. Apart from Malaysia, there are many countries especially in the developing world that

stretches the age limit of 25 years old; for instance in China, one is considered a youth until he or she reaches the age of 45 years (Samsudin, 2005).

There are attempts to institutionalise this definition through inclusion of this age range in the Malaysian Youth Organisation Act and this matter has yet to draw a conclusion after years of discussion (The Star, 26/6/2006). However, there is a little progress, recently when the Youth and Sports Minister, Datuk Seri Ahmad Shabery Cheek, said youth need new interpretation of age namely from 18 to 25 years, to be consistent with the standards of the United Nations adopted by most countries (Utusan Malaysia, 23/3/2011). According to the Minister, the ministry will ensure new age interpretation is applied before year 2017. Whatever the accepted definition of youth may be in any country, one thing is apparent that is the youth generation is always a significant national asset. Griffin (1997) points out that youth are “treated as a key indicator of the state of the nation itself”.

Malaysian youth between the ages of 15 to 39 years account for 40.18%, approximately 11.6 million of the total Malaysian population of 28.91 million in year 2010 (EPU, 2010). 50.9% of youth were male and 49.1% were female (DOS, 2010). The Malaysian youth population continues to grow and by year 2020, estimated that the number of Malaysian youth will reach 14.96 million. Of these 11.6 million Malaysian youth, 22.8% of youth are between the ages of 15-19, 22.0% are between the ages of 20-24, 20.5% are between the ages of 25-29, 18.2% are between the ages of 30-34 and 16.5% are between the ages of 35-39 (DOS, 2010). Malaysian youth population comprises many ethnic groups.

To my knowledge, no previous study has tracked age trends for Big Five in Malaysian youth. Hence, this study was primarily aimed to examined age differences and gender of Malaysian Youth in the Big Five traits domains; Conscientiousness (C), Agreeableness (A), Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E) and Openness to experience (O).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study is in form of survey to determine personality attributes of Malaysian youth. This study uses quantitative approach

### **Sample**

The population of this study is Malaysian youth between aged of 15 to 39 from different developmental age group. The locations of the study are Kedah, Klang Valley (Kuala Lumpur and Selangor), Johor, Pahang, Penang and Perak. Simple random sampling is used to identify the group of sample for this study. In this simple random sampling, each individual is chosen by chance and each member of the population has an equal chance of being chosen and include in the sample. The adequate of sample size is determined by referring to sample size indicator proposed by Krejcie and

Morgan (1970). According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), with 95% level of confidence and 3.5% sampling error, the minimum sample size from a population of 10,000,000 is 784. The Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula is chosen for determining the sample size due to its applicability to non-parameter tests, which require large sample sizes. A total of N=1036 sample collected. Hence the researcher is confident the sample size of 1036 as used in this study was adequate to generate the reliable and steadfast finding for this survey research since the samples were more than the size proposed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). At the sampling process stage, the researcher approached randomly selected youth to explain the intention of the survey and hand-over the survey booklet and allowed them to complete and handover back to researcher.

### **Instrument**

The Big Five Inventory (BFI) is the instrument used to capture the personality traits the respondents. The BFI developed by John, Donahue, and Kentle, (1991) to address the need for a short instrument to measure the big five dimensions of personality. The five BFI dimensions includes; Extraversion (E), Conscientiousness (C), Agreeableness (A), Neuroticism (N) and Openness to experience (O). Each trait is assessed by eight to ten items. The BFI takes approximately five to ten minutes to administer. Participants rate each item using 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1= "strongly disagree" to 5= "strongly agree", based on how will they feel the item describes them. There are 16 items that are written in a negative direction and therefore require reverse-scoring. The BFI 44-items which were reversed by scales and item number are Extraversion (E) scale, reverse items 6, 21 and 31; Agreeableness scale, reverse items 2, 12, 27, and 37; Conscientiousness scale, reverse items 8, 18, 23 and 43; Neuroticism scale, reverse items 9, 24 and 34 and Openness scale, reverse items 35 and 41. The summing of the item scores of a scale yields the total score that scales. Scales are summed and averaged to give the total scores for the personality profile. Cronbach alpha internal reliability of the BFI scales typically range from 0.75 to 0.90 and average above 0.80 to 0.90, with a mean of 0.85 in the United States of America and Canadian samples (John, Naumann, and Soto, 2008)

### **Pilot Test**

The purpose of the pilot study is to establish the validity and reliability of the instruments in the context of Malaysian sample. The pilot study was carried out in Klang Valley and a total of 120 youth aged ranged from 19 to 31 participated. In determining the reliability of the questionnaires, data collected from the pilot study were keyed in the computer and analysed for the reliability using SPSS 19.0. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used in the test.

### **Validity**

Validity is sub-categorised as internal validity and external validity. The most important threat to the internal validity of this study was factors related to mortality of the participants. Mortality here refers to the loss of participants due to their subsequent withdrawal during the data collection process. A number of features were used to encourage the participants to remain engaged

throughout the data collection process. Timely personal and courteous contact between the researcher and participants has minimized the mortality as a threat. This study was conducted in a timely fashion in order to obviate any threats to data becoming irrelevant. In this study external validity was ensured. All the participants approached to participate in the study completed the questionnaires and no single youth who was approached refused to participate. Generalising the findings to all members of the population is therefore justified. The behaviour that is displayed by participants just because they are aware that they are involved in study whereby instead of providing information about the real life experiences the participants might give incorrect answers. This type of threat to external validity was minimised by request the participants to be honest as possible.

### Reliability

Reliability has been described as the attribute of consistency on measurement. Joppe (2000) defines reliability as, “the extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable” (p. 1). Certainly this question of reliability was another important concern in this study especially when dealing with psychological test instrument such as questionnaires. Here below, Table 1 exhibit the reliability for current study.

**Table-1.** Results of Reliability Analysis

<b>Variables</b>	<b>number of item</b>	<b>cronbach alpha</b>
Personality Traits (BFI)	44	0.745
• Extraversion	8	0.893
• Agreeableness	9	0.751
• Conscientiousness	9	0.804
• Neuroticism	8	0.841
• Openness for experience	10	0.789

### Presentation Of Results

The researcher uses the following formula to compute the scores for domains of the BFI. For example, Extraversion has 8 items (total score = 40), while Agreeableness has 9 items (total score = 45). A score of 40 for Extraversion refer to the highest level of Extraversion, but not for Agreeableness, hence the score are incomparable. Therefore, by converting the score into 0-100% scale for all dimensions, then they are comparable as 100% in Extraversion have the same meaning pertaining to 100% in Agreeableness, the highest level. Formula below shows how the score for each dimension can be converted into 0-100% scale.  $\text{Dimension\%} = (X - \text{min}) / (\text{max} - \text{min}) \times 100\%$ . Where X = the total score of respondent for the dimension, min = minimum score for the dimension, max = maximum score for the dimension. Let's say a respondents score 30 for

Extraversion, hence the Extraversion% for the respondent:  $\text{Extraversion\%} = (30 - 8) / (40 - 8) \times 100\% = 68.75\%$ . Therefore the score level for the each domain of BFI can be interpreted.

For the purpose of this research, the researcher has divided the Malaysian youth into five groups or categories of age differences. Malaysian youth aged 15-19 addressed as “kid”, 20-24 as “young youth”, 25-29 as “middle age youth”, 30-34 as “late youth” and 35-39 as “pre-adulthood”.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results presented in this paper were analysed using descriptive statistical analysis aided by the computer software SPSS 19.0 and the results displayed in frequency and percentile forms

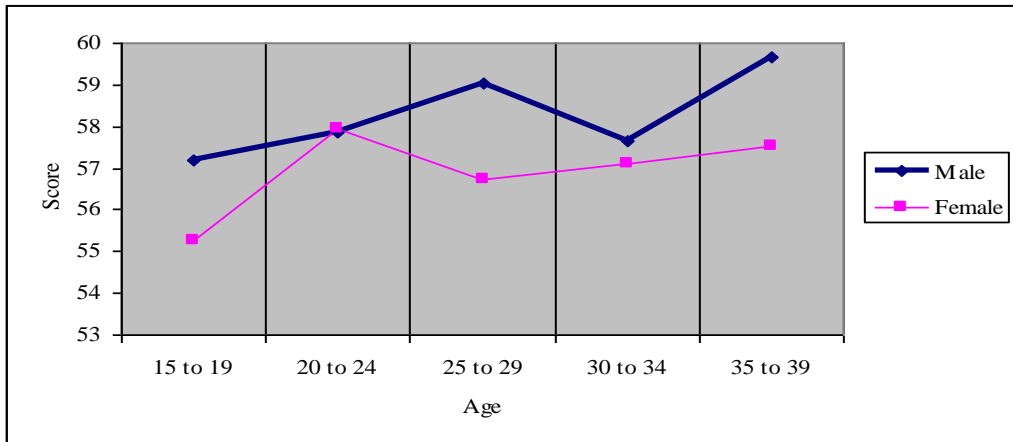
### Respondent's profile

**Table-2.** Respondent's Profile

Background	N	%
<i>Gender</i>		
- Male	448	43.2
- Female	588	56.8
Total	1036	100
-----		
<i>Age Male</i>		
15 – 19 (kid)	26	5.8
20 – 24 (young youth)	106	23.8
25 – 29 (middle age youth)	135	30.1
30 – 34 (late youth)	81	18.0
35 – 39 (pre-adulthood)	100	22.3
Total	448	100
-----		
<i>Female</i>		
15 – 19 (kid)	73	12.4
20 – 24 (young youth)	138	23.5
25 – 29 (middle age youth)	201	34.2
30 – 34 (late youth)	101	17.2
35 – 39 (pre-adulthood)	75	12.7
Total	588	100

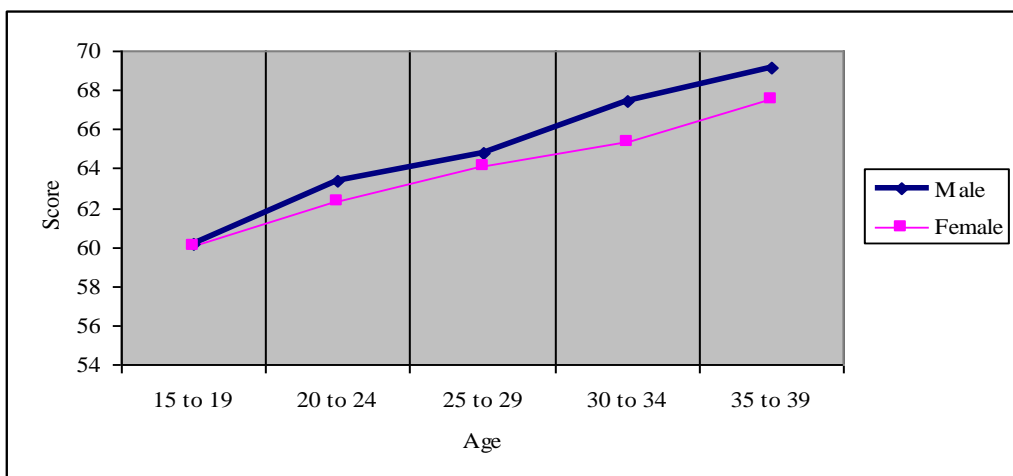
The scores in the BFI dimensions by age and gender are shown in Figure 1 to 5. In each figures thicker line shows the score for males and thin line shows the scores for females.

**Figure-1. Agreeableness**



Agreeableness: As shown in Figure 1, Agreeableness showed a positive trend from kid males to young youth for both males and females. In middle age, the males shows a positive trend while females more towards a negative trend. As males moved from middle age to late youth the trend is negative and trend is positive when males approaching the pre-adulthood. The females' scores from middle age to late youth later to pre-adulthood shows steady scores whereby a slight positive earlier and a slight negative later. Both the genders show an almost same score at young youth stage. This study shows a contradictory to the study by Soto et al (2011). Soto et al (2011) showed curvilinear, non-monotonic age trends, with negative trends from late childhood into early adolescence, and then pronounced positive into emerging adulthood. Regarding gender differences more generally males are more agreeable than were females while approaching adulthood.

**Figure-2. Conscientiousness**

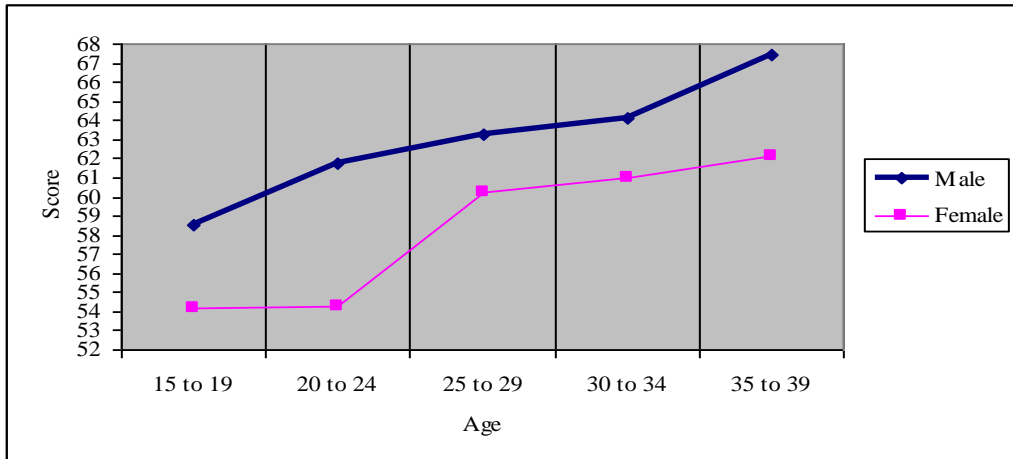


Conscientiousness: The score for the Malaysian youth of five groups of age differences are shown in Figure 2. Conscientiousness showed an opposite direction for males and females until the middle age. Conscientiousness in males showed a positive trend while females indicated a negative trend.



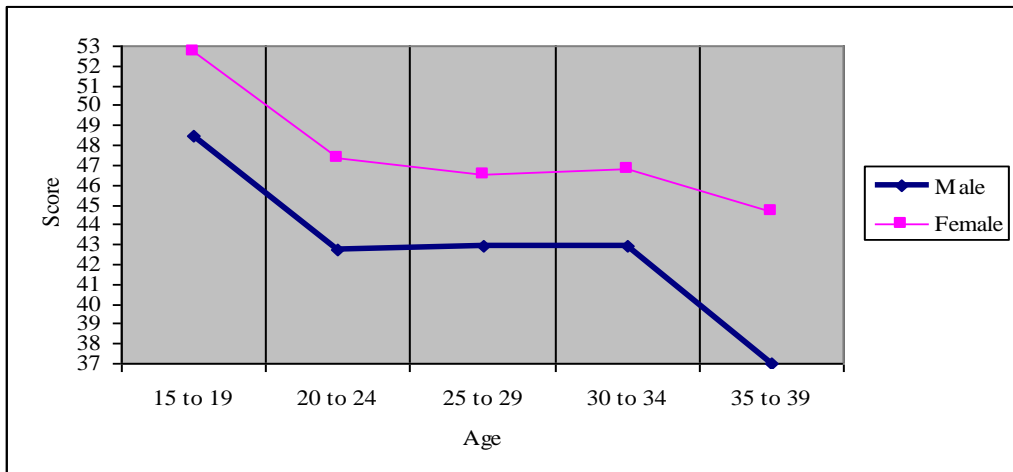
As approaching late youth and pre-adulthood the trends are positive for both the genders, while males score higher than females on the Conscientiousness. The finding from this study is contradictory from Soto et al (2011) which claimed that females are more conscientious than the males.

**Figure-3. Extraversion**

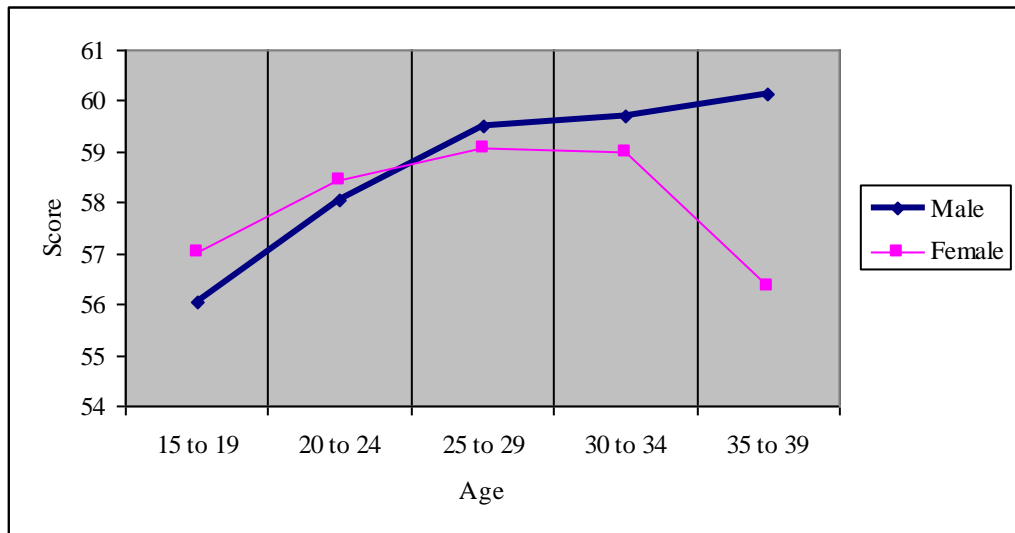


Extraversion: The scores of Extraversion are shown in Figure 3. Overall, the scores of Extraversion from kid to pre-adulthood are shown a positive trend for both males and females. Males in overall scored higher than females. It can be summarized that the trend of Extraversion among the Malaysian youth are showed flat trends from middle aged youth to pre-adulthood regardless the genders, as agreed by Soto et al (2011).

**Figure-4. Neuroticism**



Neuroticism: Figure 4 shows the scores for Neuroticism. Scores on Neuroticism indicated that female are higher than males whereby Soto et al (2011) have also have found the same trends in their findings. From kid to young youth and late youth to pre-adulthood the trends are negative for males and females. The trends are shown flat across young youth to late youth.

**Figure-5.** Openness to experience

Openness to experience: The scores of Openness to experience are shown in Figure 5. Kid to middle aged youth, the scores showed a positive trends for males and females. While for females, middle age to pre-adulthood shows a negative trend and for males is from middle to late youth. As male approach pre-adulthood Openness is shows a positive trends. At the early life of the youth females are higher scorer than males, while males are higher scorer at the pre-adulthood stage. Females show a flat trend from middle to late youth and males scores very high at the middle age.

## CONCLUSION

The main objective of the present study was to investigate age and gender differences in the personality traits in Malaysian youth with age span of 15 to 39 years. This was the first study to investigate age and gender patterns in the Big Five as measured with the BFI. As discussed earlier some findings are not consistent with the findings of previous research done in other samples.

## REFERENCE

- Allemand, M., Zimprich, D., & Hendriks, A. A. J. (2008).** "Age differences in five personality domains across the life span". *Developmental Psychology*, Vol.44, pp.758–770. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.44.3.758
- Branje, S. J. T., van Lieshout, C. F. M., & Gerris, J. R. M. (2007).** "Big Five personality development in adolescence and adulthood". *European Journal of Personality*, Vol.21, pp.45–62. doi:10.1002/per.596
- Costa, P. T., Jr., Terracciano, A., & McCrae, R. R. (2001).** "Gender differences in personality traits across cultures: Robust and surprising findings". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol.81, pp.322-331.

- De Fruyt, F., Bartels, M., van Leeuwen, K. G., De Clercq, B., Decuyper, M., & Mervielde, (2006).** “Five types of personality continuity in childhood and adolescence.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol.91, pp.538–552. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.91.3.538
- Department of Statistics, Malaysia (2010).** Labor Force Survey 2010. Putrajaya: Department of Statistics.
- Economic Planning Unit (2010).** Population by sex, ethnic group and age, Malaysia, 2010, Putrajaya: Prime Minister Office.
- Gidley, J. and Inayatullah, S. (2002).** *Youth futures: Comparative research and Transformative visions*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers.
- Griffin, C. (1997).** Representations of the young. In Ropche, J and Tucker, S (eds.). *Youth in society*. London: Sage Publications.
- John, O. P., Donahue, E. M., & Kentle, R. L. (1991).** *The Big Five Inventory—Versions 4a and 54*. Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley, Institute of Personality and Social Research.
- John, O. P., Naumann, L. P., & Soto, C. J. (2008).** Paradigm shift to the integrative Big Five trait taxonomy: History, measurement, and conceptual issues. In O. P. John, R. W. Robins, & L. A. Pervin (Eds.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (3rd ed., pp. 114–158). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Joppe M. (2000).** The research process. <http://www.ryerson.ca/~mjoppe/rp.htm>. Accessed on October 6, 2011.
- Krejcie R and Morgan, D. (1970).** “Determining Sample Size for Research Activities.” *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, Vol.30, pp.607-610.
- Klimstra, T. A., Hale, W. W., III, Raaijmakers, Q. A. W., Branje, S. J. T., & Meeus, W. H. J. (2009).** “Maturation of personality in adolescence.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol.96, pp.898 –912. doi: 10.1037/a0014746
- McCrae, R. R. (2009, June).** Cross-Cultural Research on the Five-Factor Model of Personality (Version 2). Online Readings in Psychology and Culture (Unit 6, Chapter 1/V2).
- Samsudin, R (2005).** “Communication, globalisation and national agenda: Policies, parables and paradoxes for youth development in Malaysia.” *Malaysian Journal of Communication*, Vol.21, pp.19-27.
- Soto, C. J., John, O. P., Gosling, S. D., & Potter, J. (2011).** “Age differences in personality traits from 10 to 65: Big-Five domains and facets in a large cross-sectional sample”. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol.100, pp.330-348.
- Soto, C. J., John, O. P., Gosling, S. D., & Potter, J. (2008).** “The developmental psychometrics of Big Five self-reports: Acquiescence, factor structure, coherence, and differentiation from ages 10 to 20.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol.94, pp.718–737. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.94.4.718
- The Star, 26/6/2006**
- Utusan Malaysia, 23/3/2011**
- World Bank (2006).** *Development and the Next Generation*. New York: The World Bank.