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Predicting Students' Psychological Well-Being Based on Personality Traits: The Mediating Role of Perfectionism

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Abstract: Psychological well-being is a new concept derived from positive psychology and is one of the important indicators in personal and social growth and development as well as in the evaluation of educational systems. This variable is influenced by various factors such as personality traits and perfectionism. The aim of this study was to predict psychological well-being based on personality traits with respect to the mediating role of perfectionism in students. The research method was descriptive-correlational. The statistical population was all undergraduate students of Shiraz University in 2021. The research sample was 372 people who were selected by accessible sampling method. Reef Psychological Well-being Questionnaire (1989), NEO Personality Questionnaire (1985) and Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS) (1990) were used to collect data. Pearson correlation method and path analysis were used to test the research hypotheses. The results indicated that neuroticism trait (beta = -.10), conscientiousness trait (beta = 0.16) and perfectionism (beta = -0.15) directly predict psychological well-being. Also, the variable of perfectionism mediates the relationship between neuroticism and conscientiousness with psychological well-being. In general, the research findings support the role of personality traits in psychological well-being directly and through perfectionism.

Keywords: Psychological well-being, Personality traits, Perfectionism, University students

Introduction

Manpower is the most important asset of a society and the higher the desired quality, the greater the success, survival and promotion of that community (Ghazavi et al., 2019). One of the signs of quality of human life is health (Sharbatian & Imeni, 2018). According to the World Health Organization, health is one of the indicators of countries' development (Norouzinia et al., 2013). In today's world, health is considered as an important achievement that people seek to improve quality and well-being (Najjarnasab & Dashbozorg, 2019). Scientific evidence suggests that people's lifestyle choices and patterns affect their health and success (Mohammadi Zeidi et al., 2011). Lifestyle is one of the most important pillars affecting health and includes normal and routine daily activities that people have accepted in their lives acceptably (Najjarnasab & Dashbozorg, 2019). According to Alfred Adler, lifestyle is the same character in action and is more about the specific way of life management (Fathi et al., 2020), which is closely related to each person's health, so that a healthy lifestyle promotes health (Ghanbary Sartang et al., 2016). Research has shown that life events can affect psychological well-being (Esmaeili et al., 2020). Psychological well-being from the perspective of social psychologists is a kind of feeling of satisfaction (Hatefnia et al., 2019), which means well-being and happiness and achieving full potential and includes life satisfaction, positive and negative emotions and happiness is (Ghazavi et al., 2019). According to

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Ryff, the structure of psychological well-being is defined as the development of each individual's true talents and has six components: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Some researchers consider this structure as an individual's experience of completed goals (Roslan et al., 2017). In a study, Lent et al. (2014) predicted the cognitive-social model of well-being in African students, which showed that personality traits are able to predict psychological well-being. Personality traits refer to the set of traits that exist in a person, almost permanently, and distinguish him from others (Benzi et al., 2019). This means the potential of some people to do or not to do certain behaviors. Consequently, the type of personality can predict a particular type of behavior in the person. Individuals' personality traits can provide a model for predicting their behavior and mental states, and it is these personality traits that shows why some people cope better than others with environmental conditions and variables and they have different levels of motivation. In other words, personality traits can affect psychological well-being (McCredie & Kurtz, 2020). Studies have shown that personality traits are associated with psychological well-being and academic well-being (Asikainen et al., 2018). Costa and McCray proposed the theory of five personality factors to understand human characteristics, which includes five characteristics: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Schultz & Schultz, 1994). Neuroticism is rooted in negative emotional experiences. Extraversion is a tendency towards behavior and social atmosphere and includes traits such as being social and energetic and happy behaviors. Openness to experience imply optimism, imagination, risk-taking, diverse interests, creativity, and intellectual attitudes. Agreeableness refers to compatibility and trust in others and honesty. Conscientiousness reflects the conscientiousness and commitment of individuals in various fields (Cosentino & Castro Solano, 2017).

The research of Sobol-Kwapinska (2016) showed that neuroticism is associated with low psychological well-being. Augusto Landa et al. (2010), in their research, stated that low scores on neuroticism and high scores on extraversion are most associated with psychological well-being. Dastjerdi et al. (2011) stated that personality traits are able to predict the dimensions of psychological well-being. Duan et al. (2019) in a study among students with the aim of increasing awareness of their abilities and applying them in different ways in individual and social life indicated a significant increase in mental health, well-being and reduced students' negative emotions.

Perfectionism is one of the personality traits that have been studied in relation to mental health variables in several studies. Perfectionism in general is a way of acting that is characterized by a person's desire to strive to appear perfect in most aspects of an individual's life. Perfectionism as a personality trait is a multidimensional construct defined by very high standards for performance and evaluative concerns about individual and social consequences and failure to meet these high standards (Stoeber et al., 2016). Hewitt and Flett (1991) attribute three dimensions to perfectionism. These dimensions include self-centered perfectionism (setting high and unrealistic standards for oneself), other-oriented perfectionism (having high and unrealistic expectations about others), and community-oriented perfectionism (believing that others expect perfection from person and he/she must meet their expectations. The

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adaptive dimension of perfectionism is associated with individual criteria and healthy functioning and life satisfaction, and the maladaptive dimension is associated with perfectionist assessments and negative consequences such as anxiety and depression (Park & Jeong, 2015). Besharat et al. (2014) showed that positive perfectionism has a positive relationship with mental health and negative perfectionism has a negative relationship with mental health. Positive perfectionism has a positive effect and negative perfectionism has a negative effect on psychological well-being (Kanten & Yesıltas, 2015). While in our country, the student population constitutes a large part of the youth, identifying their health status can help improve the health of this group in particular and the health of society in general. Research on the subject shows that each of the variables of the present study has been examined, but due to the effect of personality traits and perfectionism on psychological well-being, especially on students and university graduates who they are considered as one of the most valuable assets of any society and due to the importance of psychological well-being in students and the need to identify the factors affecting it, the aim of this study was to predict psychological well-being based on personality traits mediated by perfectionism.

The method of this research was descriptive-correlational. The statistical population consists of all undergraduate students of Shiraz University in 2021. The sampling method was such that due to the physical absence of individuals to complete the questionnaire due to pandemic conditions, the necessary information was provided to students through the online method (online questionnaire or online forms) and with the permission of the university to conduct this research, first the purpose of the research was sent to students and their verbal consent was obtained to participate in the assessments, and after obtaining students' consent to complete online forms through this questionnaire link (email, phone, other cyberspace, etc.), a special code was assigned to the students as well as to each respondent so that their information would remain completely confidential, individuals would be able to enter a questionnaire after entering the code and answer the questions and their answers would be collected. In order to comply with the ethical principles, the present study tried to respect the freedom of participants to participate in the research or leave it, and participants were assured about the confidentiality of the answers and the principle of confidentiality was observed. Ethical considerations were observed in all stages of the research. From the mentioned community, 400 questionnaires were sent to students by accessible sampling method. In the meantime, 28 questionnaires answered incompletely and 372 questionnaires sent complete answers and the analysis of the collected data in terms of 372 people was considered.

Instruments

Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale: Ryff developed the Scales of Psychological Well-being (SPWB) which is composed of six sub-scales in accordance with the six factors of positive functioning, namely autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others and self-acceptance. Each question in this questionnaire consists of a 6-point range (strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, disagree, agree, somewhat agree, strongly agree). Individuals score between 18 and

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108 on this questionnaire. The correlation between the short form of Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale and the main scale ranged from 0.7 to 0.89 (Ryff & Singer, 1996). The reliability of the questionnaire in the research of Saeeidi et al. (2018), was calculated by internal consistency method with Cronbach's alpha test and was confirmed with a rate of .68. In the study of Sehati Yazdi and Talebian Sharif (2019), the internal consistency of this scale using Cronbach's alpha was .71, which is consistent with the findings of Ryff and Singer (1996). In total, the 18-item Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale is a useful and practical tool for psychological assessment for Iranian boys and girls. In this study, Cronbach's alpha in this study was .73.

The NEO Personality Questionnaire (short and revised form): This inventory is a tool developed by McCrae and Costa (1985). This test is suitable for people who are 17 years old or older and has been translated, standardized and performed in Iran by Grossi (Garusi & Sufiani, 2008). The 60-question form used in this research is also used if the duration of the research is limited and general information about the personality is sufficient. The questions are set on a five-point Likert scale by (strongly disagree, disagree, indifferent, agree, strongly agree) and are answered by the individual. In this test, 12 questions are assigned to each factor (Costa Jr et al., 1991), this form was implemented on 208 students at intervals of 3 months and the reliability coefficients of 0.83, 0.80, 0.80, 0.70, 0.79, respectively for factors A, O, E, N and C were obtained. In Iran Haghshenas (1999), reported the reliability of this test using the test-retest method for neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness, respectively 0.80, 0.60, 0.58, 0.54 and 0.68. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for neuroticism factor was .68, extroversion .56, openness .73, agreeableness .86, and conscientiousness .77.

The Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS): The Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS) is a 35 question self-report measure with four sub-scales of perfectionism: Concern over mistakes and doubts about actions, Excessive concern with parents' expectations and evaluation, excessively high personal standards and concern with precision, order and organization (Frost et al., 1994)**.** Answers are measured in a 5-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5). Cronbach's alpha reported the questionnaire in the range of 0.77 to 0.93 and Cronbach's alpha reported the whole scale as 0.90. In the study of Bitaraf et al. (2010), the internal consistency coefficient for the whole questionnaire was .86. In this study, Cronbach's alpha is .84 for the whole scale.

Data analysis was performed using SPSS software version 26 and LISREL version 8.8 with Pearson correlation test and path analysis.

Results

Mean and standard deviation of research variables are presented in Table 1. According to Table 1, the mean of extraversion (27.85) is higher than the mean scores of other personality traits, and the mean scores of conscientiousness (15.52) are lower than the mean scores of other personality traits. Furthermore, according to Table 2, neuroticism with a correlation coefficient of -0.104,

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conscientiousness with a correlation coefficient of 0.163 and perfectionism with a correlation coefficient of -0.153 are significantly related to psychological well-being.

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of personality traits, perfectionism and psychological well-being

Variable	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Neuroticism	372	5	44	21.52	7.251
Extraversion	372	8	40	27.85	5.927
Openness to experience	372	8	39	24.67	3.624
Agreeableness	372	9	29	21.44	3.723
Conscientiousness	372	5	40	15.52	5.460
Perfectionism	372	56	149	93.68	15.489
Psychological well-being	372	50	76	63.54	4.483

Table 2. Pearson correlation between personality traits and perfectionism with psychological well-being

Variable	Neuroticism	Extraversion	Openness	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Perfectionism
Psychological well-being	-0.104	0.049	0.031	-0.079	0.163	-0.153
p	0.045	0.344	0.550	0.128	0.002	0.003

Figure 1 shows the tested model of the research. Table 3 indicated the model fit indices. According to Table 3, the model benefits from good fit indices. Table 4 presents the standard coefficients and the level of significance of the research model paths. According to Table 3, all direct path coefficients are significant in the research model.

Table 3. The model fit indices

Fit indices	X^2	DF	X^2/df	GFI	AGFI	CFI	RMSEA
Value	18.45	5	3.69	.92	.91	.93	.08

Table 4. Standard coefficients and the level of significance of the research model paths

Variable	**Path**	**Variable**	β	***p***
Neuroticism	→	Perfectionism	.13	0.064
Extraversion	→	Perfectionism	-.15	0.061
Openness to experience	→	Perfectionism	.14	0.014
Agreeableness	→	Perfectionism	-.10	0.029
Conscientiousness	→	Perfectionism	-.30	0.000
Perfectionism	→	Psychological well-being	-.15	0.049

Table 5 presents the bootstrap results for the indirect relationship between personality traits and psychological well-being through perfectionism. According to Table 5, the lower and upper limits of the indirect coefficients of neuroticism and conscientiousness do not include zero, so the indirect coefficients of these two paths are significant. Indirect coefficients for other variables are not significant.

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Table 5. Bootstrap results for the mediating effects of the proposed model

Variable	Bias	Std. Error	*p*	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Neuroticism	-0.004	0.130	0.034	-0.016	-0.488
Extraversion	0.009	0.202	0.061	-0.766	0.029
Openness to experience	0.004	0.249	0.064	-0.122	1.096
Agreeableness	0.006	0.210	0.059	-0.870	0.044
Conscientiousness	0.009	0.158	0.001	-1.088	-0.461

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to test a model for predicting students' psychological well-being based on personality traits with the mediating role of perfectionism. Based on the results, personality traits directly predicted the psychological well-being. The two characteristics of conscientiousness and neuroticism were also indirectly related to psychological well-being through perfectionism. The mediating variable of the study was perfectionism, which significantly predicted psychological well-being as well. The findings are consistent with previous studies. For instance, Hosseini Nasab et al. (2009) showed that with the increase of neuroticism, maternal mental health decreases and extraversion and responsibility are associated with increased maternal mental health. McCrae and Greenberg (2014) showed that openness to experience is highly correlated with mental health. Personality traits destroy or facilitate the process of adaptation and psychological and physical health by influencing one's interpretation of environmental events.

Explaining the relationship between perfectionism and psychological well-being, it can be said that positive perfectionism and striving to achieve it can be an advantage for one's health and increase one's self-satisfaction and achievement of goals, which leads to increased psychological well-being in the individual. On the other hand, extreme negative perfectionism negatively affects mental health by undermining self-confidence and realistic expectations, rejection of personal limitations, and inflexibility and dissatisfaction with personal performance. Negative perfectionism, anxiety and inner dissatisfaction are therefore a serious barrier to self-acceptance and the well-being of the individual in general, which can lead to a decrease in psychological well-being. The findings in this section were consistent with the findings of Emad et al. (2016). Emad's research showed that because perfectionists have strong self-critical assessments and extreme anxiety due to fear of failure, it can be a serious obstacle to achieving psychological well-being.

Explaining the role of personality traits in predicting students' psychological well-being through perfectionism, it can be said that the proposed model appropriately confirms the mediating effect of perfectionism on the relationship between personality traits and psychological well-being. This result shows that personality traits also affect psychological well-being by influencing perfectionism. Since personality traits have a direct effect on perfectionism, it means that with increasing neuroticism, perfectionism decreases and with increasing conscientiousness, perfectionism increases. Correspondingly, with the increase of perfectionism, students' psychological well-being increases and personality traits have a significant relationship with psychological well-being.

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Attention to Iranian culture can be concluded that parents 'expectations instead of reinforcing negative perfectionism, is a symbol of parents' attention to their children and strengthens perfectionism in a positive dimension, followed by an increase in positive emotions and psychological well-being. According to the obtained results, it can be concluded that promoting personal growth, positive and constructive relationship with others, as well as responsibility can increase a person's psychological well-being and increase positive performance in life and education.

One of the limitations of this study was the use of accessible sampling method for sample selection. Therefore, care should be taken in extending the results to other examples. Also, due to the Covid 19 pandemic, participants responded to the questionnaires online, which can increase bias in individuals' responses.

According to the research findings, it is suggested in future studies, this research should be repeated in other cities and universities and in populations other than students to be more generalizable. Also, according to the research findings, it is suggested that student counseling centers provide appropriate training workshops to empower and increase life skills for students, in order to increase the level of psychological well-being, their ability to effectively cope with stress and anxiety.

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