

## To Study the Relationship Between Perceived Stress and Personality Traits Among Undergraduate Students

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### ABSTRACT

Stress is inevitable part of our daily lives which is also considered as an unavoidable reality of life. However, it is important to understand how an individual perceives stress. The feeling and thoughts process involved in appraising an event as stressful and dealing with it accordingly. Personality traits of an individual has often been attributed in dealing with stressful event or facing a task. This paper aims to study the relationship between perceived stress and personality traits among undergraduate college students. The researcher adopts correlational design and random sampling technique. The sample comprised of 120 undergraduate college going students in Imphal, Manipur. The measurements used in this study were NEO- Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) (Form S) (McCrae & Costa, 1988) and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen, 1983). The data was analysed using SPSS-17, descriptive statistics, t-test and product moment correlation. The findings of the study indicated that Neuroticism had a significant positive relationship with perceived stress. Openness to experience, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness had significant negative relationship with perceived stress but no relationship between Extraversion and Perceived stress was found in this study.

**Keywords:** *Perceived stress, Personality Traits, undergraduate students*

Perceived stress is the feelings and thoughts of an individual about how much stress they are under at a given time or period (Cohen, 1983). The way in which a person appraises the situation as stressful plays an important role in responding to it. College students faces stressors in many forms such as academic pressure, financial constraint, relationship, peer pressure and so on. The same event maybe appraised as stressful by one and not stressful by another, the way stressor is perceiving differ among individuals. Personality traits of an individual plays a role in how a situation or event is dealt with. Research have indicated that people born with certain temperament predicts higher or lower tolerance of stress. Level of stress has been linked to the type of personality of a person. Neuroticism has found to be related to high level of stress in a study conducted among university students (Irum, 2011). This is supported by other studies where they also found that Neuroticism had the strongest stress association whereas negative association between

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stress and Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness and Openness. (Eplov & Pisinger, 2012). In another study stress was highly correlated with Neuroticism while no differences were found in subject major and personality. Further no other traits correlated with stress (Uliaszek et al, 2013). Bolger (1990) in his study examined personality under stress in medical students which indicated that there was increase in daily anxiety under stress with those high on Neuroticism trait. Conscientiousness was found as a protective factor from coping with daily stress in a study carried out by Bartley and Roesch (2010).

### Sample

The sample consisted of 120 undergraduate college going students. The age ranged from 18-28 years. The research design adopted for this study was correlational design. Data was collected using random sampling technique.

### Instruments

To assess perceived stress, the Perceived Stress Scale by Cohen (1988) was used which consists of 10 items. Each item has to be responses in a four-point rating scale, there are reverse scores for some items.

NEO-Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) by McCrae & Costa (1988) was used to assess personality. It consists of 60 items. These items assess five dimensions of Personality which are Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. Each dimension has 12 items. Each item in the test has to be responded on a five-point rating scale. there are reverse scores under each item.

The demographic detail was given along with the rest of the questionnaires.

### Procedure

**Table 1 Distribution of mean  $\pm$ SD of perceived stress and personality traits in undergraduate students.**

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Perceived Stress	120	23.5	5.0	10	33
Neuroticism	120	37.26	7.59	25	52
Extraversion	120	37.26	5.62	28	49
Openness	120	35.57	4.74	30	43
Agreeableness	120	37.76	3.49	29	44
Conscientiousness	120	39.55	6.0	26	49

*Note.* N =number of participants, SD=Standard Deviation, min=minimum, max=maximum

Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores of both female and male. The variables in this study are Perceived stress and Personality traits. Personality traits consists of five domains namely; neuroticism, extroversion, openness and agreeableness.

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**Table 2 Correlation between personality traits and coping response**

Variable	N	Perceived stress 'r'
Neuroticism	120	.67**
Extraversion	120	-.05
Openness	120	-.25**
Agreeableness	120	-.46**
Conscientiousness	120	-.46**

Note:  $n=120$ , \* $r < .05$  level (2 tailed), \*\* $r < .01$  level (2 tailed),  $r$ =correlation value

Hypothesis 1 predicted that there will be no relationship between perceived stress and personality traits and coping styles among undergraduate college students.

Table 2 shows the results obtained there was a positive relationship between neuroticism and perceived stress ( $r=.67$ ;  $<.01$ ), extroversion was found to have no relationship with perceived stress. However, there was negative relationship between perceived stress and openness ( $r= -.25$ ;  $<.01$ ), negative relationship on both agreeableness and conscientiousness ( $r=-.46$ ;  $<.01$ ,  $r= -.20$ ;  $<.01$ )

### DISCUSSION

The current study aimed to study the relationships between Perceived Stress and Personality Traits among undergraduate students in Imphal, Manipur. The findings of the study suggested that there is a correlation between the type of personality traits and level of perceived stress. Personality trait consists of five dimensions or traits which are Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. In the present study it was found that Neuroticism had a significant positive correlation with Perceived stress which is supported by previous studies and could be interpreted as those with high neuroticism is more inclined to having high perceived stress. The finding in this is obvious and predictable as previous studies has proven it too. An individual with high Neuroticism tends to have high Perceived Stress. This could be due to the fact that high Neuroticism makes the person more anxious, tensed and depressed. Due to this psychological distress it tends to make the individual more vulnerable in perceiving stress. Neurotic individuals are prone to feeling anxious, sad, and distressed when problems arise. Rather than dealing with problems head on, neurotic individuals tend to avoid finding solutions. Since neurotics tend to be more introverted, they do not have as strong as a support system to rely on. These differences in coping mechanisms could play a large role in the perceived stress of an individual. McCrae and Costa (1986) found that adults who scored high on the trait of neuroticism have been found to handle stress by withdrawing into escapist fantasies, procrastinating in making decisions, and using alcohol or drugs to sedate themselves. Stress correlated positively with neuroticism, as found in previous studies, but did not correlate with any other personality traits (Amanda, Meghan, Tyler, 2013). Extraversion was not significant with perceived stress. This is in contrary to the study conducted by Ebstrup et al (2011) where it was reported that there was significant negative relationship between Extraversion and Perceived Stress. Openness and Agreeableness were found to have negative relationship with Perceived Stress. Conscientious was found to be negatively significant to Perceived Stress. This could be due to the fact that Conscientiousness individuals, characterized as self-disciplined and persistent, engage in problem-solving as a proactive method of coping. In addition, conscientious people tend to be less impulsive and avoid engaging in risky behaviour that could lead to stress, which could have led to the finding of negative correlation with Perceived Stress. Vollrath (2000) in his study also found

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that students with more adaptive personality such as high Extraversion and Conscientiousness were less affected by Stress. As individuals with high Extraversion and Conscientiousness are more sociable, positive and goal-oriented, they are less likely to become as distressed as highly neurotic individuals. Thus, the personality trait neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness are associated with perceived stress. On the other hand, dimensions of personality trait on extraversion was not found to be significant with Perceived Stress.

### CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from this study that there exists a positive and significant relationship between neuroticism and perceived stress. Negative relationship between openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness. However, no relationship between extraversion and perceived stress. By understanding the association between personality traits and level of stress it could benefit the students in being aware of the importance of their own self in dealing with crisis in life. There is need for intervention program to further enhance coping skills so that they are able to apply it and deal effectively with stress.

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### Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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