

Openness to Experience, Neuroticism and Mental Toughness in Trainee Clinical Psychologists: Mediating Role of Perceived Social Support

Fatima Javed¹, Muhammad Nasar Iqbal², and Shahyan Qamar³

^{1,2,3}Lecturer, Department of Psychology, Lahore School of Professional Studies, The University of Lahore, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Background: Mental toughness is the ability to deal with stressors, challenges and pressures in difficult situation. Personality traits contribute in dealing with situation and role of social support enhance the ability of mental toughness.

Objective: To know about the Mental Toughness in Openness to Experience and Neuroticism personality trait people and the role of perceived social support among trainee clinical psychologists.

Methodology: The correlation research design was used to collect data and the sample of study was recruited through purposive sampling technique. The sample was consisted of (N=161) Trainee Clinical Psychologists (females). Big Five Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999), Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988), and Mental Toughness Questionnaire (Dagnal et al., 2019) were used to collect data.

Results: Results indicated significant positive correlation among Openness to Experience and Mental Toughness, whereas significant negative correlation was seen between Neuroticism and Mental Toughness. A significant positive correlation was present between Perceived Social Support and Mental Toughness. Multiple regression analysis revealed that Openness to Experience and Perceived Social Support were significant positive predictors of Mental Toughness, whereas Neuroticism was found as a significant negative predictor of Mental Toughness.

Conclusion: This study demonstrated that trainee clinical psychologists who are open minded towards new experiences are more mentally tough however trainee clinical psychologists with higher level of emotional instability have lower level of mental toughness.

Keywords: Personality Traits; Perceived Social Support; Mental Toughness; Trainee Clinical Psychologists

INTRODUCTION

Personality is a set of qualities or characteristic which are unchangeable and make an individual different and unique from others. It can be defined as a person's distinctive way of thinking, feeling and behaving. It embraces opinions, mood attitudes and how people interact with each other. A person's personality can be observed how he or she makes relationship with the environment as well as with their social groups. It includes both innate and learned behavioral characteristics that differentiate one person to another¹.

It is being observed that many people around us tend to have different characteristics. Some people are talkative, some are shy and some people seem very nervous and anxious. When we use these words we actually describe their personality. Every individual has different characteristics which make him/her different from the others. According to the big 5 personality model there are five major traits of personality².

Openness to experiences. It can be defined as the tendency to escalate new things, art and imagination. It indicated how open minded a person is towards new experiences. People high on openness are very creative and they are always ready to try new things. Those individuals who adopt openness tend to have wide variety of interests as they like and enjoy adventures³. Those individuals who have low openness to experience trait avoid new experiences and stick to old habits. People having this personality traits face difficulty in changing old habits and routines⁴.

Neuroticism. This characteristic refers to emotional instability, sadness and irritability. People who has this characteristic they has mood swings, sadness, anxiety and moodiness. In any situation they experience stress, they become worried easily, they feel anxious and they do not have resilience. People with low neuroticism are emotionally stable, relaxed and has resilience⁵. A research suggested that big five traits could be used to describe personality in more than 50 different cultures. Psychologists believed that these traits have biological origin as well⁶.

Social support consists of having people whom you can rely on and they provide you physical and emotional comfort while you face difficulties in daily life. Social support usually comes from family and friends. Whenever a person faces crises in his life he turns to his family and friends to get assistance. Social support plays an important role in person's life to function properly. People who receive social support tend to have a great life because social relationships are linked with various aspects of wellness and health⁷.

It can be defined as an individual's perception/believe about whether he/she is getting support from his/her network or not. It is people's believe either his need for support is fulfilled or not. Physical setting, support provided, other's actions and attitudes, recipient's actions and attitude are some factors that impact the perception of support⁸.

Perception of recipient can also be influenced by other's attitudes and actions. How the provider offers support is very important. The recipient's activities and attitudes also influence the

perception of support. If the recipient has low self-esteem, fear of dependency, suspicion, fear or insecurities, it is more likely that he will perceive that he is not getting any support⁸.

Mental toughness can be defined as the ability which people have to deal with stressors, challenges and pressures, and perform well regardless of and difficult situation⁹. The concept of mental toughness as a personality trait than later they argued that this is a separate trait and its relation could be seen with big five personality traits. Individual with high level of mental toughness are likely to be outgoing, talkative and have high amount of emotional responses. Whereas individuals with high level of neuroticism tend to has more anxiety and find it difficult to cope with stressors⁹.

Trainee is someone who is learning and performing a particular skill for a specific job. Trainee clinical psychologist is a person who is not qualified and getting training to be a clinical psychologist. Before becoming a professional psychologists go through a training phase. Training period involve academic learning, research, personal and professional developments and clinical placement¹⁰.

Trainees also undergo through clinical placements which is done under supervisor and usually consisted of 1 year or 4 months period. Training period can be challenging and it provides mature approach to learning and good self-care learning to trainees¹¹.

To measure expectations of the trainees a specific questionnaire was constructed. Results showed that in personality style enhancing, extroversion, outgoing, modifying and agreeing characteristics were high as compare to other characteristics. Results also showed high social support and less psychological adaptation and expectation in sample¹².

Social support is influenced by personality traits due to number of reasons. First reason included that the reaction of people around us are often induce by our traits which means that the people around us behave us in a way which matched with our personality¹³.

Neuroticism was the negative predictor of perceived social support whereas openness to experience, extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness were significant positive predictors of perceived social support. Perceived development of positive personality traits might promote by the help of perceived social support¹⁴.

A study in Pakistan reported that neuroticism is associated with emotional instability. People having neuroticism personality traits are more anxious and have less psychological adjustment. It

was reported that perceived social support was negatively correlated neuroticism and positively correlated with openness to experience¹⁵.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted to find out the relationship among personality traits, perceived social support and mental toughness in trainee clinical psychologists. Inform consent was taken from the trainee clinical psychologists. Participants were ensured that their data will be kept confidential. Participants were selected on the basis of inclusion criteria specifically female trainee clinical psychologists' age range between 21-31 years old. Correlational research design was used to find out relationship among study variables. In this study purposive sampling technique was used to collect data from the trainee clinical psychologist. Sample size was 161 female trainee clinical psychologists. Demographic data was collected from the participants such as age, education year, clinical placement hours, previous training experience and institute was included as demographic variables. Big Five personality scale was used in this research. The big five inventory was developed by John and Srivastava¹⁶. This inventory consisted of 44 items with five point likert scale. Along this, this inventory included five subscales for example openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism. In this study we have used two personality traits openness to experience and neuroticism that comprise to 18 items. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) of these two factors, openness to experience was 0.77 and neuroticism was 0.71. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support is a self-administered questionnaire which was developed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet and Farley¹⁷. This scale consisted of 12 items with 7 point likert scale. This scale was designed to measure the perceived social support from 3 significant sources i.e. family, friends and significant others. For each dimension 4 item are present. The reliability of this scale is 0.88. Mental Toughness Questionnaire 10 (MTQ-10) was used to measure mental toughness. This scale was developed by Dagnal and others¹⁸. This scale consisted on 10 items with 5 point likert scale. Along this, this scale included four subscales for example control, commitment, challenge and confidence. The reliability of this scale is 0.77.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

For analysis SPSS 21 version was used. Frequency distribution test was administered. Correlation research design was administered to find out the relationship among study variables.

Multiple heretical regression analysis was applied to find out predicting variables. T-Test analysis and ANOVA analysis were administered to find out the difference among groups. The significant level was consider $p \leq 0.05$.

RESULTS

The data was collected form the female trainee clinical psychologist age range between 21 to 31 years old. Three scales were used along with the demographic sheet for the purpose of the main study. To assess Personality Traits, Perceived Social Support and Mental Toughness in Trainee Clinical Psychologists from Government, Semi Government and Private universities.

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha of Personality Traits Openness to experience, Neuroticism, Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support and Mental Toughness Questionnaire (N = 161)

Variable	No. of Items	α
Openness to Experience	10	.77
Neuroticism	8	.71
Perceived Social Support	12	.89
Mental Toughness	10	.77

Note. α = Cronbach's Alpha

The above table showed Cronbach's Alpha for three scales i.e. The Big Five Inventory two factors includes 18 items with 0.77 Cronbach's alpha of openness to experience and 0.71 Cronbach's alpha of neuroticism, The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support includes 12 items with .89 Cronbach's alpha and Mental Toughness Questionnaire includes 10 items with .77 Cronbach's alpha.

Table 2

Pearson Correlation, Mean and Standard Deviation of Personality Traits Openness to Experience, Neuroticism, Perceived Social Support and Mental Toughness in Trainee Clinical Psychologists (N = 161)

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Openness to Experience07	.14	.26****
2. Neuroticism	-.18**	-.57****

3. Perceived Social Support36***
4. Mental Toughness
Mean	36.59	24.67	5.31	32.59
Standard Deviation	3.82	5.15	1.04	4.12

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The above table illustrated Pearson Correlation among Personality Traits openness to experience, neuroticism, Perceived Social Support and Mental Toughness in Trainee Clinical Psychologists. The findings indicated significant positive correlation among openness to experience with mental toughness. Neuroticism showed significant negative correlation with perceived social support and mental toughness. Results also illustrated that perceived social support showed significant positive correlation with mental toughness.

Table 3

Multiple Regression Analysis of Personality Traits Openness to Experience, Neuroticism, Perceived Social Support and Mental Toughness in Trainee Clinical Psychologists (N=161)

Variable	B	95% CI	SEB	B	R ²	ΔR ²
Step 1						
Neuroticism	-.478	[-.57, -.38]	.048	-.597***	.43	.43***
Openness	.337	[.21, .47]	.065	.312***		
Step 2						
Neuroticism	-.443	[-.54, -.35]	.047	-.554***	.47	.05***
Openness	.299	[.17, .42]	.064	.277***		
PSS	.882	[.42, 1.34]	.236	.223***		

Note: CI= Confidence Interval

PSS= Perceived Social Support

*** $p < .001$

The above table showed the role of Personality Traits and Perceived Social Support in Mental Toughness in Trainee Clinical Psychologists. The R² Value of .42 revealed that the predictors explained 42% variance in the outcome variable with $F(2, 158) = 58.58, p < .001$. Findings revealed that openness to experience ($\beta = .31, p < .01$), positively predicted mental toughness and neuroticism ($\beta = .59, p < .001$), negatively predicted mental toughened in trainee clinical

psychologists. The results have also revealed that the R^2 value of .47 predictor explained 47% variance in the outcome variable with $F(3, 157) = 46.93, p < .001$. Results revealed that perceived social support positively predicted mental toughness in trainee clinical psychologists.

DISCUSSION

Present study aimed to determine the relationship among Personality Traits Openness to Experience and Neuroticism, Mental Toughness in Trainee Clinical Psychologists and mediating role of perceived social support.

The findings of the present research indicated that openness to experience showed significant positive correlation with Mental Toughness and neuroticism showed significant negative correlation with Mental Toughness. Similar findings were seen in Goddard study where moderate to strong relation was present among mental toughness and personality traits i.e. neuroticism, and openness to experience¹⁹. These findings support the description of mentally toughness individuals as according to Clough⁹ Individual with high level of mental toughness are likely to be extraversion i.e. they are outgoing, talkative and have high amount of emotional responses. They tend to be more relaxed as they have higher calmness level. As compare to others they tend to have low level of anxiety and emotional instability. Whereas those individuals who have high level of neuroticism tend to have more anxiety and find it difficult to cope with stressors.

Results illustrated moderate to high correlation between Perceived Social Support and Mental Toughness. Similar findings were seen in literature as a study results showed association between perceived social support and grit²⁰. Grit can be defined as the ability to stick towards a goal without any concern for recognition or reward²¹. Grit is another name of mental toughness. It means that when trainee will develop higher level of perceived availability of support their mental toughness will also increase. As social support has been a relationship with pro-active coping²². When trainees will develop a sense of availability of support their coping style will strengthen which will ultimately strengthen the mental toughness.

Another primary hypothesis was to find out the role of Personality Traits and Perceived Social Support in Mental Toughness of Trainee Clinical Psychologists. As predicted personality traits i.e. openness to experience and neuroticism were significant predictors of mental toughness. Similar findings were present in literature²³. It means assertiveness, sociability, tendency to try

new things strengthen the mental toughness whereas emotional instability weaken mental toughness. Literature suggested that perceived social support predict mental toughness²⁰. In the present study perceived social support was also found as a significant predictor of mental toughness.

CONCLUSION

The examination of two personality traits, openness to experience and neuroticism and perceived social support in trainee clinical psychologists provided understanding of both positive and negative effects of these variables on Mental Toughness. This study concluded that Personality Trait such as openness to experience has a significant positive correlation with mental toughness and neuroticism has a significant negative correlation with perceived social support and mental toughness. Those trainee clinical psychologist who are having a personality trait openness to experience have more social support and they have more mental toughness as compare to those trainee clinical psychologist who have neuroticism personality trait as they have less social support and less mental toughness. Perceived social support is a predictive factor of mental toughness and play a role of mediator between personality traits and mental toughness.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

There were few limitations were present in this study such as two personality traits were selected for this study because all five traits required large number to data. Further suggestions are remaining three traits need to analysis and large sample size should be used to evaluate mental toughness and role of social support.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There was no conflict of interest in this study.

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