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Personality Traits as a Predictor of Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism among Young Adults

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Abstract: This study investigates the role of personality traits as predictors of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism among young adults. A sample of 175 participants aged 18–25 years was analysed, with personality traits assessed using the Big Five Inventory-2 Short Form (BFI-2-S) and perfectionism dimensions measured through the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R). Statistical analysis, encompassing correlation and regression methods, indicated that conscientiousness strongly forecasted adaptive perfectionism and order, underscoring its association with organized, goal-oriented, and disciplined actions. Neuroticism proved to be the most significant predictor of maladaptive perfectionism, highlighting its link to emotional instability, self-critical behaviours, and psychological distress. Agreeableness displayed a favourable relationship with order, whereas extraversion and openness provided moderate impacts on striving and distress aspects. These results highlight the complex nature of perfectionism and the unique impact of personality traits on both adaptive and maladaptive behaviours. This study enhances the comprehension of the relationship between personality and perfectionism, providing both theoretical perspectives and practical uses. It emphasizes the significance of nurturing adaptive perfectionist behaviours via conscientious attributes and tackling neuroticism to reduce maladaptive inclinations. The results are significant for mental health professionals, teachers, and policymakers in creating approaches to foster emotional wellness and a balanced pursuit of goals.

Keywords: *Perfectionism, Adaptive, Maladaptive, Big Five Traits, Young Adults*

1. Introduction

The pursuit of excellence is a fundamental aspect of human behaviour, but the ways in which individuals set and strive toward high standards vary widely. Some embrace perfectionistic goals with resilience, while others struggle with excessive self-criticism and fear of failure. Understanding the personality traits that influence these tendencies is crucial for psychological research and practical interventions.

Personality is a key determinant of individual differences, influencing thought patterns, emotional regulation, and behaviour. It provides a framework for understanding how individuals interact with their environments, manage stress, and achieve their goals (McCrae & Costa, 1997). The Five-Factor Model (FFM), which includes Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism, is widely regarded as an effective approach to studying personality (John & Srivastava, 1999). Examining the relationship between these traits and perfectionism offers insight into adaptive and maladaptive striving.

Perfectionism is a multidimensional construct involving the pursuit of high standards accompanied by self-evaluation processes (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). While adaptive perfectionism fosters motivation and achievement, maladaptive perfectionism is linked to anxiety, depression, and excessive fear of mistakes (Curran & Hill, 2019). Hewitt and Flett's (1991) model categorizes perfectionism into self-oriented, socially prescribed, and other-oriented dimensions, highlighting the interplay between personal aspirations and external pressures.

Research suggests conscientiousness is a strong predictor of adaptive perfectionism, fostering persistence and goal-oriented behaviour (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). In contrast, neuroticism correlates with maladaptive perfectionism, amplifying self-doubt and sensitivity to criticism (Smith et al., 2019). Openness encourages creativity and problem-solving, supporting adaptive perfectionism (McCrae & Costa, 1997). Extraversion may mitigate the adverse effects of perfectionism by facilitating social support, whereas agreeableness has a weaker association with perfectionistic tendencies (Stoeber & Otto, 2006).

This study seeks to examine the extent to which personality traits predict adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism among emerging adults in India. It hypothesizes that conscientiousness will positively predict adaptive perfectionism, while neuroticism will strongly correlate with maladaptive perfectionism. Additional traits, including openness,

extraversion, and agreeableness, may display varying relationships with perfectionistic behaviours.

By exploring the interaction between personality traits and perfectionism, this research aims to inform psychological interventions and educational strategies that promote adaptive striving while reducing maladaptive tendencies. Future studies can investigate cultural influences on perfectionism and personality to enhance counselling approaches and mental health assessments.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Objectives

- a) To assess the levels of personality traits and perfectionism in individuals aged 18–25 years.
- b) To examine the relationship between personality traits and adaptive perfectionism.
- c) To explore the relationship between personality traits and maladaptive perfectionism.
- d) To analyse which specific personality traits significantly predict adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism.

2.2 Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant relationship between conscientiousness and adaptive perfectionism.

H2: There is a significant relationship between neuroticism and maladaptive perfectionism.

H3: There is a significant impact of personality traits on maladaptive perfectionism, with Neuroticism emerging as the strongest positive predictor.

H4: There is a significant impact of personality traits on adaptive perfectionism and order scores, with Conscientiousness emerging as the strongest positive predictor.

H5: There is a significant impact of specific personality traits on overall perfectionism.

2.3 Variables

2.3.1 Independent Variable: Personality Traits

The independent variable in this study is personality traits, which are expected to influence the level of perfectionism. Personality traits, such as Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience, reflect stable patterns of behavior, thoughts, and emotions that vary across individuals and are believed to shape their approach to perfectionism.

2.3.2 Dependent Variable: Perfectionism

The dependent variable is perfectionism, which refers to an individual's striving for flawlessness and setting excessively high standards. Perfectionism is characterized by two forms: adaptive perfectionism, where individuals set high standards and maintain organization without negative emotional consequences, and maladaptive perfectionism, where the gap between standards and performance leads to self-criticism and emotional distress.

2.4 Research Design

The present study used a quantitative, cross-sectional, research design to examine the relationship between personality traits and perfectionism among young adults aged 18–25 years. Data were collected at a single point in time to assess whether specific personality traits significantly predict adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism. This design allows for statistical analysis using correlation and regression to explore both associations and predictive capabilities between the variables.

2.5 Sample

A total of 175 participants in the age range of 18 to 25 years were selected using convenience sampling. Participants were recruited through online platforms, academic institutions, and social networks. The sample size was determined to ensure sufficient power for correlation and regression analyses.

2.5.1 Inclusion Criteria

- a) Individuals aged between 18 and 25 years.
- b) Ability to read and comprehend English.
- c) Willingness to give informed consent for participation.

2.5.2 Exclusion Criteria

- a) Individuals outside the specified age range.
- b) individuals with any diagnosed psychological conditions that may influence their responses.

2.6 Measures

2.6.1 Big Five Inventory-2 Short Form (BFI-2-S)

The Big Five Inventory-2 Short Form (BFI-2-S), developed by Soto and John (2017), assesses five core personality traits: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience. It consists of 30 items, with responses on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores on each dimension indicate a stronger presence of that trait. The BFI-2-S is reliable, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients typically above .80 for each factor, and shows validity in predicting various life outcomes, such as job performance and interpersonal relationships.

2.6.2 Almost Perfect Scale – Revised (APS-R)

The Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R), developed by Slaney et al. (2001), measures perfectionism through three dimensions: High Standards, Order, and Discrepancy. The scale includes 23 items, rated on a 7-point Likert scale. Higher scores on Discrepancy reflect maladaptive perfectionism, while high scores on High Standards and Order reflect adaptive perfectionism. The APS-R has strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values typically between .80 and .90, and it demonstrates validity in measuring perfectionism, correlating with psychological distress, self-esteem, and achievement motivation.

2.7 Procedure

Participants were provided with an informed consent form before beginning the survey. After obtaining consent, they were given an online form or hard copy questionnaire (depending on availability) containing demographic questions, the BFI-2-S, and the APS-R. The confidentiality and anonymity of responses were assured. The average time taken to complete the survey was approximately 10-15 minutes. Data were screened for completeness and accuracy before analysis.

2.8 Statistical Analysis

The collected data were analysed using Jamovi statistical software. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were computed to understand the distribution of scores. Pearson's correlation was used to examine the relationships between personality traits and perfectionism dimensions. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify which personality traits significantly predicted adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism.

3. Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for the variables of the study

Variables	N=175	
	Mean	Standard Deviation
Extraversion	18.2	4.49
Agreeableness	22.1	3.92
Conscientiousness	20.5	4.06
Neuroticism	18.6	4.56
Openness	20.6	3.23
High Standards	37.2	6.15
Discrepancy	52.2	14.4
Order	20.5	4.23

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for the five personality traits and three dimensions of perfectionism. The study consisted of 175 individuals. Average scores reflected moderate levels of Extraversion ($M = 18.20$, $SD = 4.49$), Conscientiousness ($M = 20.50$, $SD = 4.06$), and Neuroticism ($M = 18.60$, $SD = 4.56$), alongside slightly elevated levels of Agreeableness ($M = 22.10$, $SD = 3.92$) and Openness ($M = 20.60$, $SD = 3.23$). Regarding perfectionism, participants achieved high scores on High Standards ($M = 37.20$, $SD = 6.15$), moderate on Order ($M = 20.50$, $SD = 4.23$), and the highest on Discrepancy ($M = 52.20$, $SD = 14.40$), indicating significant variability in self-critical perfectionism.

Correlation and Regression

Table 2: *Correlation Matrix of the Study Variables for the Total Sample*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. High Standards	–							
2. Discrepancy	0.26***	–						
3. Order	0.53***	- 0.02	–					
4. Extraversion	0.16*	-0.31***	0.13	–				
5. Agreeableness	0.30***	-0.29***	0.41***	0.14	–			
6. Conscientiousness	0.31***	-0.29***	0.60***	0.37***	0.52***	–		
7. Neuroticism	-0.02	0.43***	-0.19**	-0.43***	-0.28***	-0.41***	–	
8. Openness	0.18*	-0.12	0.093	0.10	0.16*	0.11	-0.02	–
<i>Note, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$</i>								

Table 2 displays the correlations among the variables for the entire sample. As shown in Table 2, High standards scores had a significant and positive correlation with Conscientiousness ($r = .32$, $p < .001$). Discrepancy scores showed a strong positive correlation with Neuroticism ($r = .44$, $p < .001$) and a negative correlation with Extraversion ($r = -.31$, $p < .001$). Order scores showed a strong positive correlation with Conscientiousness ($r = .61$, $p < .001$), suggesting that those with high conscientiousness are closely linked to organized structure.

Table 3: *Multiple Regression Analysis Results*

	High Standards			Discrepancy			Order		
Variables	β	t	p	β	t	p	β	t	p
Extraversion	0.114	1.41	0.160	-0.133	-1.733	0.085	-0.093	-1.354	0.178
Agreeableness	0.205	2.45	0.015	-0.168	-2.120	0.035	0.128	1.796	0.074
Conscientiousness	0.229	2.54	0.012	-0.007	-0.082	0.934	0.594	7.697	<.001
Neuroticism	0.184	2.24	0.027	0.329	4.203	<.001	0.049	0.709	0.479
Openness	0.115	1.61	0.109	-0.078	-1.157	0.249	0.014	0.241	0.014

Note, For high standards, $R = 0.413$, $R^2 = 0.170$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.146$; for discrepancy, $R = 0.498$, $R^2 = 0.248$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.226$; for order, $R = 0.627$, $R^2 = 0.393$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.375$

Table 3 presents standardized regression coefficients (β), t -values, R^2 , and adjusted R^2 for the High Standards, Discrepancy, and Order subscales of the APS-R. The first regression analysis, examining Adaptive Perfectionism via the High Standards subscale, showed significance, $R = .41$, $F(5, 596) = 28.92$, $p < .001$, with conscientiousness as the only significant positive predictor ($\beta = .23$, $p = .012$). The second analysis, focusing on Maladaptive Perfectionism through the Discrepancy subscale, also yielded statistical significance, $R = .50$, $F(5, 596) = 27.51$, $p < .001$, with Neuroticism as a significant positive predictor ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$). In the third model, assessing Order as the dependent variable, the results were statistically significant, $R = .62$, $F(5, 596) = 27.51$, $p < .001$, with conscientiousness emerging as a strong positive predictor ($\beta = .61$, $p < .001$). These findings highlight the varying influences of personality traits on perfectionism dimensions.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of personality traits as predictors of perfectionism among young adults, focusing on adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism. The findings supported the hypotheses that conscientiousness significantly predicted adaptive perfectionism, while neuroticism was a dominant predictor of maladaptive perfectionism. Conscientiousness was found to be a significant predictor of both high standards ($\beta = .23$, $p = .012$) and order ($\beta = .61$, $p < .001$), which aligns with research by Stoeber and Otto (2006), highlighting the disciplined and goal-oriented nature of conscientious individuals. Similarly, Hill et al. (2010) found that conscientiousness fosters adaptive perfectionistic tendencies marked by diligence and tenacity. The study's findings on order and conscientiousness align with Stoeber and Damian (2016) and Roberts et al. (2009), who emphasized structured organizational behaviours in conscientious individuals.

On the other hand, neuroticism was a significant influence on maladaptive perfectionism, confirming its role in perfectionistic distress and emotional instability. Regression analysis indicated that neuroticism was the most significant predictor of discrepancy ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$), consistent with previous research by Sherry et al. (2007), which linked neuroticism with perfectionistic worries and emotional turmoil. Flett and Hewitt (2002) also connected neuroticism with psychological distress and dissatisfaction due to unfulfilled expectations. Rice and Ashby (2007) emphasized how emotional instability intensifies frustration and self-critical perfectionism, reinforcing the findings of the present study.

Beyond conscientiousness and neuroticism, other traits, such as extraversion and openness, had moderate associations with perfectionism dimensions. Extraversion negatively correlated with maladaptive perfectionism ($r = -.31, p < .001$), reflecting findings from Rice et al. (2014), who reported lower perfectionistic distress in socially outgoing individuals. Similarly, openness showed a positive correlation with adaptive perfectionism ($r = .19, p < .001$), resonating with Stoeber and Rambow (2009), who associated openness with intellectual and creative engagement. These secondary influences provide deeper insight into perfectionistic tendencies beyond primary predictors.

This study has significant theoretical and practical implications. The findings contribute to psychological literature by reinforcing established theories on perfectionism and personality traits while incorporating culturally relevant perspectives for young adults in India. From a therapeutic standpoint, the study highlights the importance of emotional regulation strategies for individuals high in neuroticism to mitigate maladaptive perfectionism. Additionally, structured goal-setting approaches can benefit those high in conscientiousness, promoting adaptive perfectionistic behaviours.

Despite its contributions, the study has certain limitations. The sample size and gender imbalance restrict generalizability, as a more diverse sample could strengthen the applicability of findings across populations. Additionally, the study primarily focused on personality traits, overlooking other psychological variables, such as emotional intelligence and coping mechanisms, that may further explain perfectionism behaviours. Moreover, the cross-sectional design limits insights into the developmental trajectory of perfectionism.

Future research should aim to increase sample diversity and integrate additional psychological variables to create a more holistic understanding of perfectionism. Longitudinal studies could examine the evolution of perfectionistic traits over different life stages, while intervention-focused research could assess strategies to effectively address maladaptive perfectionism. Expanding research methodologies and broadening theoretical frameworks would further enrich knowledge in the domain of personality and perfectionism.

5. Conclusion

The study investigated the role of personality traits as predictors of adaptive and maladaptive among young adults. By examining big five personality traits - conscientiousness, neuroticism, extraversion, openness, and agreeableness, the study provided insights into how these characteristics shape perfectionistic tendencies. The findings emphasized the multi-

dimensional nature of perfectionism, with distinct personality traits driving adaptive or maladaptive behaviours.

Conscientiousness was identified as the key predictor of adaptive perfectionism, highlighting its link to organized, disciplined, and goal-focused efforts. People who score high in conscientiousness displayed constructive perfectionistic behaviours centered on high standards and organization, emphasizing its function as a characteristic that encourages productive and achievement-oriented tendencies. On the other hand, neuroticism emerged as the most significant predictor of maladaptive perfectionism, indicating emotional instability along with a propensity for self-criticism and distress regarding unfulfilled expectations. This emphasizes the role of neuroticism in sustaining self-doubt and emotional anguish, positioning it as key to comprehending maladaptive perfectionistic tendencies. Traits such as extraversion and openness also played a moderate role, with extraversion showing a negative correlation with maladaptive perfectionism and openness positively linked to adaptive striving, highlighting the intricate relationship among these characteristics.

In summary, this study offers significant insights into the dynamics of both adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism, emphasizing the role of conscientiousness in promoting positive perfectionistic behaviour's and noting neuroticism as a key focus for alleviating perfectionistic distress. These results establish a foundation for upcoming research aimed at creating specialized interventions, theoretical progress, and practical uses in educational, professional, and therapeutic environments, ultimately promoting emotional health and balanced ambition among young adults.

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