UNVEILING THE NEXUS OF PERSONALITY TRAITS, OSTRACISM, AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Habiba Tariq[1], Muhammad Nasar Iqbal[2], and Fatima Javed[3]
1. Lecturer: Humanities and Social Sciences, Gift University, Gujranwala.
2. Snr. Lecturer: Lahore School of Behavioural Sciences, The University of Lahore.
3. Lecturer: Lahore School of Behavioural Sciences, The University of Lahore.

Corresponding Author:
Name: Muhammad Nasar Iqbal; **Email:** psynasir@gmail.com

Abstract

Personality traits are significant factors influencing mental health outcomes, shaping how individuals perceive, cope with, and respond to stressors. In university students, understanding the role of personality can offer insights into individual differences in vulnerability or resilience to mental health challenges. The present study was conducted to find out the relationship among personality traits, ostracism, and mental health issues in university students. A correlational research design with a convenient sample technique was used to collect data (N=300; n=150 male and n=150 female) from the university students. Data was collected by utilizing three self-report measures i.e., a Substantively Valid Ostracism Scale (SVOS; Ferris, 2008), General Health Questionnaire (GHQ, Goldberg & Hillier, 1979), and Big Five Inventory (BFI, Goldberg, 1993). The results revealed that neuroticism, a personality trait, was positively correlated with ostracism and mental health issues, while openness to experience personality traits negatively correlated with ostracism and mental health issues in university students. Additionally, ostracism showed a significant positive correlation with mental health issues. Furthermore, females scored higher in ostracism and mental health issues compared to males. Gaining insight into these dynamics can help develop focused treatments and support systems that improve students' general well-being in educational environments.

Keywords: Personality traits, ostracism, mental health issues, and university students.

Introduction

The process of learning, gaining, or delivering the knowledge, skills, values, or morals from madrasas school, college, or university level is called education (Indicators, 2023). Many students face ostracism at any point in their lives (Ren et al., 2016), either at school, college, or university, but most of the students of university are at higher risk of being ostracized (Smith et al., 2017). Ostracism means neglecting one person or making them feel unwanted or rejecting one's presence. Ostracism is poles apart from the term social banishment (Nezlek et al., 2012). Ostracism is different from actions like bullying someone or doing physical harm or abuse it is rather an act of neglecting individuals (Williams & Nida, 2009).

Mental health issues are health conditions that cause distress and difficulty functioning, and can change a person's thinking, feelings, or behavior (WHO, 2022; Khan et al., 2021; Kazmi et al., 2023; Sabri et al., 2021). The existing literature showed a strong positive association, suggesting that social exclusion, ostracism, and isolation experiences are significantly linked to an increased risk of mental health issues (Riva & Eck, 2016). There seems to be a real impact that ostracism has as a societal phenomenon on university students' psychological health (Smith et al., 2017). This realization highlights the need to address social dynamics as well as individual personality qualities, highlighting the necessity for all-encompassing solutions to lessen the negative impacts of ostracism on mental health within the academic community (Newell, 2017). The entwined stories of personality traits and ostracism showed a complex interaction between social dynamics and individual predispositions in the education setting (Fatima et al., 2020).

Ostracism can harm a person's mental health, increasing the risk of disorders like anxiety, depression, physical symptoms, social dysfunction, and sleeplessness (Nezlek et al., 2015). Individual differences in how people perceive and manage the issue, as well as their distinct personality qualities, impact how symptoms appear (Bonanno & Burton, 2013). Personality, derived from the Latin word "Persona," comprises the representation of different roles or covers to express one's individuality (Kernberg, 2016). Personality development is attributed to individual experiences and free choice by behavioral therapists such as B.F. Skinner and John B. Watson (Phelps, 2015). According to the well-known notion of Freud's psychosexual model, a person's personality develops through developmental phases, with potential fixation if a stage is not effectively completed (Kesavelu et al., 2021). By highlighting the critical significance that every stage of life plays in forming an individual's identity, Erick Erickson's psychosocial stages offer an additional perspective on personality development (Maree, 2022).

Five domains are included in the trait theory of personality: agreeableness, extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness (Soto & Jackson, 2013;). Being open-minded and adventurous is a hallmark of an adventurous personality (Suedfeld, 2022). Conscientiousness is the ability to set goals and take part in actions that move one closer to them (Roberts et al., 2014). A person's level of neuroticism indicates how content they are with who they are and how willing they are to talk about their bad experiences (Tamir, 2005). There are two types of introverts: quiet, introspective introverts and outgoing, gregarious extroverts (Woodward, 2014). The three hierarchy levels were first proposed by trait theory pioneer Gordon Allport. These levels are cardinal qualities, which shape conduct; core traits, which form the basis of behavior (e.g., kindness, loyalty); and situational secondary traits, which emerge under particular contexts, including preferences and attitudes (Allport, 1967; Novikova, 2013).

The study investigated the complex interactions among university students' mental health concerns, ostracism experiences, and personality factors. The research aimed to reveal how particular personality features, such as neuroticism or extraversion, may influence susceptibility to mental health difficulties in the context of ostracism, in recognition of the possible influence of individual characteristics on one's response to social exclusion. The study's goal in examining these dynamics was to provide insightful information that would help develop focused interventions and support systems to improve university students' general well-being in the face of social and psychological pressures.

Hypotheses of Study:
- Personality trait (openness to experience) would likely to significantly negatively correlated with ostracism and mental health issues, while (neuroticism) would likely to significantly positively correlated with ostracism and mental health issues in university students.
- Ostracism would likely to significantly positively correlated with mental health issues in university students.
- Female university students are likely to face more ostracism and mental health issues compared with males.

Research Design/Technique
A correlational research design and convenient sampling technique were employed to collect data from the university students.

Sample
The total sample size was (*N*=300) and it was collected from 4 government and private university

students located in Lahore Pakistan. The sample was distributed into two categories i.e., (n=150) male students and (n=150) female students.

Measures

Demographic Performa

Demographic performa consisted of the basic information of the participants including gender (male and female) and type of university (government and private).

Big Five Inventory (BFI)

Big Five Factors (dimensions) of personality was developed by Goldberg, (1993) and contain 44 items. For each item five answer possibilities are available (1-Disagree strongly, disagree a little, 3-Neither agree nor disagree, 4- Agree a little, 5- Agree Strongly). Overall, the average Cronbach's alphas for each of the BFI factors were openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism are 0.86, 0.89, 0.77, 0.90, and 0.74 respectively but in the present study only two factors i.e., (openness to experience and neuroticism) were used.

Substantively Valid Ostracism Scale

Substantively Valid Ostracism Scale developed by Lance Ferris (2008) had 13 items. The respondents were asked to rate how closely each statement describes them by replying to each item based on a seven-point Likert-type response scale ranging from "never" to "always. The coefficient alpha reliability estimates were.94 respectively.

General Health Questionnaire (GHQ)

The GHQ was developed by Goldberg and Hillier (1979) as a self-report instrument for the assessment of individuals with an increased likelihood of current mental health. The GHQ-28 incorporates four subscales: somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction, and severe depression. Each item of GHQ was evaluated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "Not at all" to "Much more than usual". Cronbach's Alpha for depression, anxiety, insomnia, insomnia, social dysfunction, and physical symptoms were 0.90, 0.88, 0.81, 0.78, and 0.69 respectively.

Results

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability of Personality Traits (Openness to Experience and Neuroticism), Ostracism and Mental Health Issues in University Students (N = 300)

Variable	No. of Items	α
Neuroticism	8	.76
Openness to experience	10	.86
Substantively Valid Ostracism Items	13	.73
General Health Questionnaire	28	.89

Note. α = Cronbach's Alpha

The above table presents Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients for the study variables. Remarkably, Openness to Experience scored, and Neuroticism showed a reliability of.56.86, Ostracism Items Found to Be Substantially Valid.73 and a good reliability of.89 on the General Health Questionnaire.

Table 2

Pearson Correlation, Mean, and Standard Deviation of Personality Traits (Openness to Experience and Neuroticism), Ostracism and Mental Health Issues in University Students (N = 300)

Variables	N	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Openness to Experience	300	24.03	5.15	…	-.19*	-.31**	-.34**
2. Neuroticism	300	35.03	5.56	…	…	.42**	.47**
3. Ostracism	300	36.38	10.11	…	…	…	.51**
4. Mental Health Issues	300	63.98	14.83	…	…	…	…

*Note. *$p<.05$, **$p<0.01$, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, N= Total Sample Size*

The above table showed correlation coefficients, means, and standard deviations for personality traits (openness to experience and neuroticism), ostracism, and mental health issues in university students. Particularly, openness to experience was negatively correlated with mental health issues, while neuroticism and ostracism showed positive correlations with Mental Health Issues.

Table 3
Independent Sample t-test for Education Sector, Ostracism, and Mental Health Issues (N = 300).

Variable	Sector				t	p	95% Interval		Cohen's d
	Government		Private				LL	UL	
	M	SD	M	SD					
Ostracism	35.35	9.68	36.11	10.37	1.48	.14	-4.09	.57	0.18
MHI	65.12	14.16	64.20	15.27	1.11	.27	-1.50	5.35	0.13

Note. MHI= Mental Health Issues

The above table presented the results of an independent sample t-test for the difference in the education sectors. The results revealed non-significant differences between government and private university students.

Table 4
Independent Sample t-test for Gender, Ostracism, and Mental Health Issues (N = 300).

Variable	Gender				t	p	95% Interval		Cohen's d
	Male		Female				LL	UL	
	M	SD	M	SD					
Ostracism	26.16	5.18	31.17	6.32	2.18	.01	1.23	2.99	0.29
MHI	35.23	7.29	47.20	8.23	2.67	.01	1.50	2.25	0.27

Note. MHI= Mental Health Issues

The above table presented the results of an independent sample t-test for the difference based on

gender. The findings showed a higher level of ostracism and mental health issues among female university students compared to males, with a medium effect size.

Discussion

The present study aimed to find out the relationship among personality traits (openness and neuroticism), ostracism, and mental health issues among university students. The findings indicated that the reliability of the questionnaires was deemed satisfactory.

It was hypothesized that personality traits (openness to experience) would likely to significantly negatively correlated with ostracism and mental health issues, while (neuroticism) would likely to significantly positively correlated with ostracism and mental health issues in university students. The findings indicated that there was a significant negative correlation between openness to experience and the level of ostracism in university students. The findings of this study matched with the existing literature such as Yaakobi (2022) conducted a study to investigate the personality as a moderator of immediate and delayed ostracism distress. He found similar results that openness to experience significantly negatively correlated with ostracism. Moreover, Skuzińska et al. (2023) conducted a study to investigate the relationship among openness to experience, workplace, bullying, and employee mental health. They conducted this study on 659 employees using a cross-sectional survey sample. They found that openness to experience negatively correlated with mental health issues i.e., stress, anxiety, depression, etc.

Moreover, it was hypothesized that neuroticism personality traits would be positively correlated with ostracism and mental health issues. The findings revealed significant results. The existing literature was evident with the findings of this study. For example, Dudert et al. (2020) presented their perspective on the personality perspective on risk and protective factors of ostracism. They revealed that personality factors i.e., neuroticism significantly impactful for ostracism and the mental health of the people. Similarly, Cigdem et al. (2017) conducted a study in which they investigated workplace ostracism and work engagement: the moderating role of neuroticism. The findings indicated a negative correlation between work engagement and workplace exclusion. Furthermore, the negative correlation between job engagement and workplace exclusion was mitigated by neuroticism. Overall, the findings showed that when workplace exclusion rose, work engagement fell, and more neurotic employees were more severely impacted by exclusion.

Similarly, Menon et al. (2018) conducted a study on personality traits such as neuroticism and disability to predict psychological distress in medically unexplained symptoms: a three-year experience from a single center. They found the same results i.e., more than half of participants with medically unexplained symptoms have associated with psychological distress. High levels of neuroticism and disability are potential markers of psychological distress in medically unexplained symptoms. Along with this, it was hypothesized that ostracism would be positively correlated with mental health issues. The findings revealed significant positive results. The results were similar to the previous literature. For example, Dudert et al. (2021) conducted a study to investigate the longitudinal associations between ostracism and depression over three years. They found the same results ostracism causes mental health issues such as depression. Likewise, Zhu et al. (2023) conducted a study on 940 college students to find out the associations between ostracism, anger rumination, and social aggression. They found similar results that ostracism causes anger issues in humans.

Lastly, it was hypothesized that female university students face more ostracism and mental health issues. The findings were matched with the previous literature such as Van Engelen et al. (2022) conducted a study on subtle ostracism faced by women in engineering and they found similar results with these findings. Furthermore, Cadigan et al. (2022) investigated the physical and mental health issues facing community college students and found that women were more likely to list mental health issues compared to men.

Conclusion

The findings showed that the personality characteristic of neuroticism was positively connected with both mental health problems and ostracism, while the personality trait of openness to experience was negatively correlated with ostracism and mental health issues. Furthermore, there was a strong positive association between mental health problems. In addition, women scored higher than men on ostracism and mental health difficulties.

Limitation and Recommendation

In the present study, data was entirely collected from district Lahore. It is recommended to gather data from all across Punjab or even Pakistan for better generalizability. Additionally, students hailing from rural areas and studying in urban universities may come across increased ostracism. Therefore, it is worthwhile to conduct an inclusive study specifically focusing on students from rural areas.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have not declared any conflict of interest.

References

Allport, G. W. (1967). Gordon W. Allport.

Batool, A., & Iqbal, M. N. (2021). A Correlational study of Personality Traits, Self-esteem and Desire for Fame in TikTok Makers: Ayesha Batool and Muhammad Nasar Iqbal. *Forman Journal Of Social Sciences*, *1*(1).

Bonanno, G. A., & Burton, C. L. (2013). Regulatory flexibility: An individual differences perspective on coping and emotion regulation. *Perspectives on psychological science*, *8*(6), 591-612.

Cadigan, J. M., Duckworth, J. C., & Lee, C. M. (2022). Physical and mental health issues facing community college students. *Journal of American college health*, *70*(3), 891-897.

Cigdem, K. A. Y. A., Ataman, G., & Aydin, B. Y. (2017). Workplace ostracism and work engagement: the moderating role of neuroticism. *International Journal of Business and Management*, *5*(2), 17-28.

Fatima, T., Bilal, A. R., & Imran, M. K. (2020). Phenomenology of Retaliating to Workplace Ostracism in Academia. *Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research*, *35*(2).

Indicators, O. E. C. D. (2023). Education at a Glance 2022. *link]. Acesso em março de*.

Kazmi, S. M. A., Murtaza, F., Hashmi, F., Iftikhar, M., Iqbal, M. N., & Nasir, A. (2023). Predictive and Protective Role of Grit, Internal Locus of Control and Social Support in Mental Health of Cardiac Patients: Protective Role of Grit, Internal Locus of Control and Social Support in Cardiac Patients. *Pakistan Journal of Health Sciences*, 34-42.

Kernberg, O. F. (2016). What is personality? *Journal of personality disorders*, *30*(2), 145-156.

Kesavelu, D., Sheela, K., & Abraham, P. (2021). Stages of psychological development of child-an overview. *Int J Curr Res Rev*, *13*(13), 74-8.

Khan, S. M., Iqbal, M. N., & Rafiq, M. (2021). Family Support, Coping Strategies and Mental Health Issues among Mothers with Down Syndrome Children. *Jahan-e-Tahqeeq*, *4*(3), 707-713.

Maree, J. G. (2022). The psychosocial development theory of Erik Erikson: critical overview. *The Influence of Theorists and Pioneers on Early Childhood Education*, 119-133.

Menon, V., Shanmuganathan, B., Thamizh, J. S., Arun, A. B., Kuppili, P. P., & Sarkar, S. (2018). Personality traits such as neuroticism and disability predict psychological distress in medically unexplained symptoms: a three- year experience from a single centre. *Personality and Mental Health*, *12*(2), 145-154.

Newell, E. E. (2017). Entrepreneurial community success: Psychological characteristics, experiences, and identity. In *Toward Entrepreneurial Community Development* (pp. 254-281). Routledge.

Nezlek, J. B., Wesselmann, E. D., Wheeler, L., & Williams, K. D. (2012). Ostracism in everyday life. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, *16*(2), 91.

Nezlek, J. B., Wesselmann, E. D., Wheeler, L., & Williams, K. D. (2015). Ostracism in everyday life: The effects of ostracism on those who ostracize. *The Journal of social psychology*, *155*(5), 432-451.

Novikova, I. (2013). Trait, trait theory. *The encyclopedia of cross- cultural psychology*, *3*, 1293-1295.

Phelps, B. J. (2015). Behavioral perspectives on personality and self. *The Psychological Record*, *65*, 557-565.

Ren, D., Hales, A. H., & Williams, K. D. (2016). Ostracism: Being ignored and excluded. In *Ostracism, exclusion, and rejection* (pp. 20-38). Routledge.

Riva, P., & Eck, J. (2016). The many faces of social exclusion. *Social exclusion: Psychological approaches to understanding and reducing its impact*, *26*.

Roberts, B. W., Lejuez, C., Krueger, R. F., Richards, J. M., & Hill, P. L. (2014). What is conscientiousness and how can it be assessed? *Developmental psychology*, *50*(5), 1315.

Rudert, S. C., Janke, S., & Greifeneder, R. (2021). Ostracism breeds depression: Longitudinal associations between ostracism and depression over a three-year-period. *Journal of Affective Disorders Reports*, *4*, 100118.

Rudert, S. C., Keller, M. D., Hales, A. H., Walker, M., & Greifeneder, R. (2020). Who gets ostracized? A personality perspective on risk and protective factors of ostracism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 118*(6), 1247–1268.

Sabri, T., Jabeen, A., & Iqbal, M. N. (2021). Self-concept, emotional regulation and mental health problems in medical and dental undergrads. *Jahan-e-Tahqeeq*, *4*(3), 680-687.

Skuzińska, A., Plopa, M., & Plopa, W. (2023). Openness to Experience, Workplace Bullying, and

Employee Mental Health. *Advances in Cognitive Psychology*, *19*(3).

Smith, R., Morgan, J., & Monks, C. (2017). Students' perceptions of the effect of social media ostracism on wellbeing. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *68*, 276-285.

Soto, C. J., & Jackson, J. J. (2013). Five-factor model of personality. *J. Res. Personal*, *42*, 1285-1302.

Suedfeld, P. (2022). Adventures in Extreme Environments. *Adventure Psychology: Going Knowingly into the Unknown*.

Tamir, M. (2005). Don't worry, be happy? Neuroticism, trait-consistent affect regulation, and performance. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *89*(3), 449.

Van Engelen, S. N., Henderson, J., Salem, D., & Davies, T. C. (2022). The subtle ostracism faced by women in engineering: has anything changed? *Global Journal of Engineering Education*, *24*(2).

Williams, K. D., & Nida, S. A. (2009). Is ostracism worse than bullying. *Bullying, rejection, and peer victimization: A social cognitive neuroscience perspective*, 279-296.

Woodward, J. I. (2014). *Introversion: Thriving and Leading in an Extroverted World* (Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University).

World Health Organization. (2022). *WHO guidelines on mental health at work*. World Health Organization.

Yaakobi, E. (2022). Personality as a moderator of immediate and delayed ostracism distress. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *61*(4), 1454-1477.

Zhu, W., Lu, D., Li, C., Tian, X., & Bai, X. (2023). Longitudinal associations between ostracism, anger rumination, and social aggression. *Current Psychology*, 1-8.