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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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The Relationship of Personality Traits with Problem-Solving Styles and Perceived Social Support among Psychiatric Patients

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Abstract: The current study aimed to examine the relationship of personality traits with problem-solving styles and perceived social support among psychiatric patients of Pakistan. Research design of a correlational study was used across the psychiatric population aged 18-60 years and educated at least at an intermediate level. The data collection was completed from 103 outpatients with diagnosed psychiatric disorders without psychosis. A convenient sampling technique was utilized for data collection, and three Urdu-translated versions of instruments were utilized to measure the study variable, including the Ten Item Personality Inventory, Problem-Solving Style Scale, and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. Permissions were taken from relevant authors and institutes. Results showcased significant correlations between conscientiousness type of personality and approach style of problem-solving, as well as between emotional stability and problem-solving self-efficacy. Moreover, strong social support networks were linked to better problem-solving capabilities. The study underscores the importance of integrating cultural and familial contexts into mental health interventions to enhance mental health stability. It also has notable implications across domains of treatment formulation and tailoring, identifying prognosis based on personality types, level of perceived social support, and styles of problem-solving in each patient. It also carries significant applicability towards therapeutic work, providing valuable insights for practitioners.

Keywords: Personality Traits, Big-Five, Problem-Solving Styles, Perceived Social Support, Psychiatric Patients

Introduction

Psychiatric disorders are defined as any condition characterized by cognitive and emotional disturbances, abnormal behaviors, impaired functioning, or any combination of these. (APA, 2018). DSM has comprehensively classified 70+ disorders into 19 different classes, including depressive disorder, anxiety disorders, bipolar and related disorders, obsessive-compulsive and related disorders, feeding and eating disorders, as well as personality disorders. These disorders can significantly impact an individual's routine life, relationships, work life, and overall well-being.

Personality traits are a multifaceted concept that signifies a person's choice of behavior in certain situations as well as their trust in others for their availability in times of need, i.e., perceived social support. One's subjective belief about the availability and sufficiency of the social support networks under adversities is known as perceived social support, and it has been recognized as a core determinant of psychological well-being, especially among individuals with mental health concerns (Zimet et al., 1988; Uchino, 2006).

Personality is being shaped by all environmental (parenting styles, neighborhood, etc.) and social factors (familial support, friendships, relationships, norms of society) along with cognitive factors such as learning, decision-making, problem-solving, etc.

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Perceived Social Support: This can vary significantly from the actual social support available based on an individual's personality traits. For example, high levels of neuroticism, which are characterized by low emotional stability to experience negative emotions, are often associated with lower perceived social support. This is because individuals who are high in neuroticism tend to have a pessimistic worldview and are more prone to interpret social interactions negatively, which can lead to feelings of isolation and inadequate support (Starr & Davila, 2008).

Social support is a crucial part of one's life that boosts individuals to reduce the levels of experienced and perceived stress while also supporting their coping skills to better deal with stressful situations (Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2010).

Problem-Solving: Problem-solving is a complex procedure that begins after initial observation of a gap present and then working towards and finalizing the application and assessment of an explanation to fill that gap (Khan et al., 2016). It is also described as an attempt to acquire an acceptable explanation for the presenting problem (Arsalan, 2010).

Problem-solving is also defined as a 21st-century skill that involves two aspects: systematic observation and critical thinking to find a workable solution or way to reach the desired goal. The framework of problem-solving builds on two major skills: observation and critical thinking (Rahman, 2019).

While formulating the model of problem-solving styles, a special emphasis was put on depression with the Attributional Style Theory. Problem-solving control highlights an internal and external control dimension in problem situations. Also, avoidance style highlights a tendency to sweep things under the rug rather than dealing with them. Creative style involves creating, formulating, and thinking about alternative available and possible solutions in terms of stage three of the problem-solving process, as suggested by Nezu (1987). Moreover, problem-solving confidence refers to a belief in one's own ability to solve problems. Lastly, approach style is the indication of a positive attitude towards preceding problems and a tendency to handle them head-on.

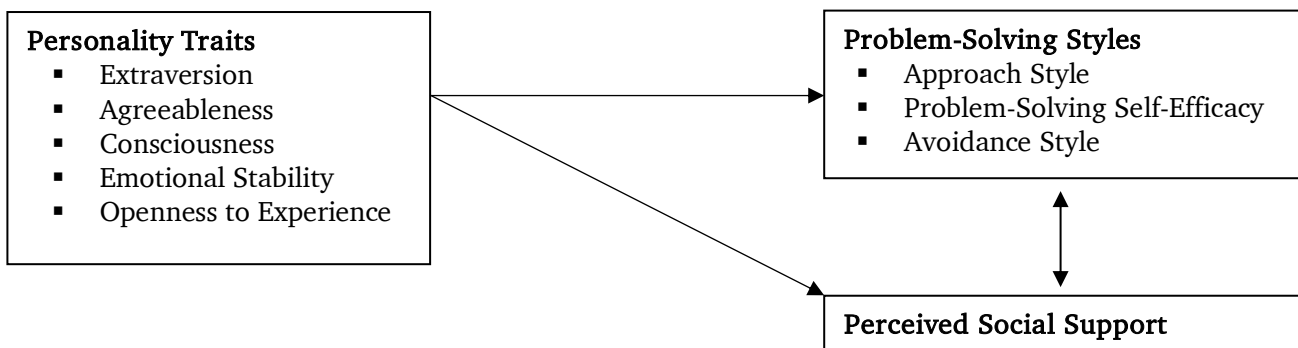
Personality Traits & Problem Solving: Personality traits significantly influence an individual's approach to problem-solving, dictating not only the strategies employed but also the effectiveness of these strategies. For example, people who show openness to experience are more likely to demonstrate creativity and a preference for suitable solutions; this polishes their ability to think outside the box (McCrae & Costa, 1992). Furthermore, highly conscientious people tend to go for systematic and organized problem-solving approaches, ensuring thoroughness and attention to detail (McCrae & Costa, 1992). Moreover, studies have suggested that extraversion can lead to a collaborative and social approach to problem-solving, likely because extraverts are often energized by group dynamics and external input (John & Srivastava, 1999). In contrast, introverts might prefer solitary reflection, which can lead to deep, independent analysis (John & Srivastava, 1999). Similarly, participants who score high in agreeableness tend to engage in cooperative problem-solving, valuing harmony and consensus, whereas those with high neuroticism may struggle with stress and anxiety during problem-solving, potentially hindering their effectiveness (John & Srivastava, 1999). By understanding, recognizing, and leveraging inherent traits, individuals can work on their problem-solving styles to enhance their efficiency and success across different domains of life.

While working on developing a problem-solving style questionnaire, I discovered that problem-solving style is a key variable in the mediation of life stress, psychological health, and illness, generally as a multidimensional construct. During this process, they also concluded from the two studies that problem-solving style is an important variable in the explanation of the psychological illness and also in the realm of understanding the stress process. (Cassidy & Long, 1996).

Problem-Solving & Perceived Social Support: Some researchers have proposed that the relationship between problem-solving styles and perceived social support may be bidirectional. Nezu (1986) posited that perceived social support could enhance problem-solving abilities by providing resources that foster more adaptive approaches. Meanwhile, ineffective problem-solving might lead to decreased social support, either through actual loss of support or through a negative perception of the support available.

Personality Traits & Perceived Social Support: Another longitudinal study conducted on older age people with a span of eight years examined the relationship between the Big Five personality traits (OCEAN) and perceived social support. Using data from the Interdisciplinary Longitudinal Study on Adult Development (ILSE), researchers analyzed two waves of data spanning eight years. The sample included 491 individuals aged 64 to 68 years at T1, i.e., older adults. They used four dimensions of perceived social support were assessed, including emotional support, social integration, practical support, and social strain. The NEO-FFI was used to measure personality traits according to the Big Five. Results of the study demonstrated significant concurrent correlations as well as changes in correlation among personality traits and social support. Notably, the impact of personality traits (OCEAN) on social support types varied: extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism were most relevant with changes in social support, while openness showed the least association. This research sheds light on the dynamic interplay between personality and social support in old age (Pfund & Allemand, 2024).

Conceptual Framework



1. There is a relationship between personality traits and perceived social support among psychiatric patients.
2. There is a relationship between personality traits and problem-solving styles among psychiatric patients.
3. There is a relationship between problem-solving styles and perceived social support among psychiatric patients.

Sample

The sample comprised 103 participants with an age range of 18-60, educated till intermediate, outpatients with a definite diagnosis were taken and recruited via a convenience sampling technique.

Instruments

Current study utilized three instruments: 10-Item Personality Inventory (Gosling et al., 2003) to identify traits of personality from Big five spectrum, and Problem Solving Style Scale Cassidy and Long (1996) was used to identify the style of problem-solving among psychiatric patients, and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPS) (Zimet et al., 1988) to identify the levels of perceived social support i.e high or low.

Procedure

Permission was taken from all relevant and concerned authorities, and psychiatric units were approached for psychiatric patients. Initially, the participants were briefed about the study, and then informed consent was provided to each patient along with a questionnaire, while ensuring confidentiality. Then the distributed questionnaires were collected, and participants were given the chance to ask any questions related to the research or the questionnaire. In order to analyze the results, SPSS-25 was used for descriptive analysis, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, and t-test.

Table 1

Pearson's Product Correlation of Personality Traits, Problem Solving Styles, and Perceived Social Support

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Extraversion	-	.11	.14	.14	.21*	0.09	0.01	-0.4	0.05
2 Agreeableness		-	.368**	.05	.16	-.01	.139	.00	.01
3 Conscientiousness			-	.05	.33**	-.10	.343**	-.13	-.03
4 Emotional Stability				-	.32**	.20*	.14	-0.5	.02
5 Openness					-	-.02	.17	-.03	.02
6 Problem-Solving Self-Efficacy						-	.059	.00	-.07
7 Approach Style							-	.19*	.214*
8 Avoidance Style								-	.22*
9 Perceived Social Support									-

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

Table 1 Shows Pearson's Product Correlation of Personality Traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness), Problem-Solving Styles (Problem-Solving Self-Efficacy, Approach Style, and Avoidance), and Perceived Social Support (N=213)

The correlational Table 3 displays the relationships between personality traits, problem-solving styles, and perceived social support. The significant positive correlation between personality traits and problem-solving styles is found between emotional stability and approach style problem-solving ($r = .20$, $p < .05$). This implies that emotionally stable individuals are more likely to opt for approach-oriented problem-solving strategies.

Approach style is positively correlated with emotional stability ($r = .20$, $p < .05$) and perceived social support ($r = .214$, $p < .05$). This suggests that individuals who use an approach style in problem-solving are more likely to be conscientious, emotionally stable, and feel supported socially.

Avoidance style shows a significant positive correlation with perceived social support ($r = .22$, $p < .05$). This is somewhat counterintuitive as social support is generally expected to reduce avoidance behavior. This finding might indicate that even individuals with higher perceived social support may still resort to avoidance under certain conditions.

Perceived social support shows significant positive correlations with approach style ($r = .214$, $p < .05$) and avoidance style ($r = .22$, $p < .05$). The positive correlation with approach style is consistent with the expectation that social support fosters active problem-solving. The positive correlation with avoidance style might reflect a more complex relationship where individuals, despite high social support, may still engage in avoidance due to other factors such as personality traits or the nature of their problems.

Discussion

The study identified the relationship among different traits of personality and problem-solving styles in psychiatric patients and perceived social support. The findings provided insight into the prevalent personality

traits against depressive disorders, anxiety, and other disorders (sleep disorders, OCD, and others) within the context of the Pakistani community with psychiatric disorders.

Our First hypothesis that personality traits (Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability) are related to certain problem-solving styles (approach problem-solving style and Problem-solving self-efficacy) as hypothesized. The current study has revealed a significant positive correlation between conscientiousness and an approach problem-solving style ($r = .343, p < .01$). These findings are consistent with both indigenous and international literature. Conscientious individuals are often more organized, disciplined, and proactive in addressing problems, which enhances their problem-solving self-efficacy and approach style (Bleidorn et al., 2021). To be organized and disciplined, an individual needs higher cognitive functioning, which in turn can result in adaptive and well-functioning styles of problem-solving through the course of life. Highly conscientious individuals also structured lifestyles and choices, which in turn help them develop a style of problem-solving that is organized, thought out, and structured.

Highly emotionally stable individuals are generally calm and report fewer negative emotions or feelings towards others or life. This study revealed a significant relationship of emotional stability with problem-solving self-efficacy ($r = .20, p < .05$) and approach style ($r = .14, p < .05$). Emotionally stable individuals tend to experience fewer negative feelings, enabling them to approach problems more calmly and effectively (John & Srivastava, 1999). Research by Khan and Rehman (2017) highlights that interventions aimed at improving emotional stability can significantly enhance problem-solving abilities among young adults in Pakistan. Certain international research also supports these findings, indicating that emotional stability is crucial for adaptive problem-solving (Patel et al., 2018).

The second hypothesis that personality traits have a relationship with the levels of perceived social support is rejected. Recent studies conducted by Cukrowicz (2008) highlight that the perception of social support is independent of personality traits. The reasons discussed are their altered perception of available support due to diagnosed psychological disorders.

Another reason for insignificant findings might be the positive or negative influence of the family members. In a joint family system, instead of supporting and uplifting each other, individuals might try to control each other through their say, influence, or connectedness, which might result in a perception of little to no social support despite the presence of a social network. Also, personality traits determine behaviors mostly instead of perception or choices.

According to our third hypothesis, the perception of availability or unavailability of social support around can impact how a person approaches their problems and resolves them. In case of high social support available, such as family or friends, a person might feel comfortable sharing his/her burden with them and brainstorm solutions. The significant relationship between approach problem-solving style and perceived social support ($r = .214, p < .05$) underscores the importance of social networks in enhancing adaptive problem-solving capabilities. In Pakistan, communal living and family support are prevalent, which is why individuals with strong social support systems are better equipped to tackle problems effectively (Kareem et al., 2023). This finding is supported by international studies showing that social support not only provides emotional comfort but also practical assistance, thereby improving problem-solving outcomes (Cohen & Wills, 1985). In the psychiatric population, perceived social support as well as adaptive problem-solving styles can be a critical factor in their recovery, management, and elevation of mental health conditions and/or symptoms.

Overall, the results indicate the significance of considering the cultural and familial contexts in psychological research and interventions. The results underscore the potential benefits of joint family systems in promoting certain personality traits and coping mechanisms, which can be leveraged in clinical settings to enhance psychological well-being.

Conclusion

The study concludes the intricate relationship among personality traits, problem-solving styles, and perceived social support among psychiatric patients in Pakistan. The results have emphasized the key presence of cultural and familial contexts in shaping mental health outcomes. With the complex integration of these factors into therapeutic interventions, mental health professionals can better understand and respond to the individualized needs of the psychiatric population. This will ultimately boost treatment outcomes along with the overall well-being of patients. Future research might continue to explore these relationships, considering the evolving cultural dynamics and their impact on mental health.

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