

The Influence of Personality and Perfectionism on Depression among Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

The trend of depression among university students is at a worrying level. Proactive steps must be taken seriously to curb this issue before students resort to non-suicidal self-injury or develop suicide ideation. Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of personality traits and perfectionism on depression among undergraduate students. Specifically, this study also examines the influence of five personality dimensions (Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism) on depression, as well as the influence of perfectionism on depression among university students. A convenience sampling method was employed which involving 106 undergraduate students from a university in Malaysia. Standardized instruments used to collect the data were the Big-Five Inventory (BFI), Frost's Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS) and Beck's Depression Inventory (BDI). The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis. The findings revealed that respondents demonstrated moderate levels across all personality dimensions, a high level of perfectionism, and a low level of depression. Additionally, the results indicated that Openness to experience, Agreeableness and Neuroticism significantly influenced depression. Perfectionism was also found to influence depressive symptoms among university students. Implications, recommendations and study limitations are further discussed.

Keywords: Personality traits, perfectionism, depression, undergraduate students

Abstrak

Trend kemurungan dalam kalangan pelajar universiti berada pada tahap yang membimbangkan. Langkah proaktif perlu diambil secara serius bagi menangani isu ini sebelum mereka cenderung ke arah mencederakan diri tanpa niat membunuh diri atau mempunyai idea untuk membunuh diri. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti pengaruh ciri-ciri personaliti dan keinginsempurnaan terhadap kemurungan dalam kalangan pelajar prasiswazah. Secara khusus, kajian ini juga meneliti pengaruh lima dimensi personaliti (Keterbukaan terhadap Pengalaman, Keberhemahan, Ekstraversi, Kebersetujuan dan Neurotisme) terhadap kemurungan dan pengaruh keinginsempurnaan terhadap kemurungan dalam kalangan pelajar universiti. Kaedah persampelan mudah telah digunakan yang melibatkan seramai 106 pelajar prasiswazah daripada sebuah universiti di Malaysia. Tiga instrumen yang digunakan untuk mengumpul data ialah *Big-Five Inventory* (BFI), *Frost's Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale* (FMPS) dan *Beck's Depression Inventory* (BDI). Data dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif dan analisis regresi berganda. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa responden mempunyai tahap sederhana dalam semua dimensi personaliti, tahap keinginsempurnaan yang tinggi dan tahap kemurungan yang rendah. Selain itu, keputusan kajian menunjukkan bahawa Keterbukaan terhadap pengalaman, Kebersetujuan dan Neurotisme memberikan pengaruh yang signifikan terhadap kemurungan. Keinginsempurnaan juga didapati mempengaruhi kemurungan pelajar. Implikasi, cadangan dan limitasi kajian ini dibincangkan dengan lebih lanjut.

Kata kunci: Ciri-ciri personaliti, keinginsempurnaan, kemurungan, pelajar prasiswazah

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Mental health significantly impacts an individual's physical health, quality of life and productivity. In Malaysia, the prevalence of mental health issues has reached worrying levels. Furthermore, the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019 has affected the lives of many people and indirectly contributed to the increase in mental health problems in Malaysia (Wazir et al., 2023). According to the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) in 2020, nearly half of the million Malaysians was found to experience symptoms of stress and depression. In addition, data from the Ministry of Health (2022) revealed that there is an increased trend in mental health issues, including suicidal behavior, with an 81% increase in suicide cases in 2021 (1,142 cases) compared to 631 in 2020. If unaddressed, this trend is expected to escalate in the coming years.

Moreover, statistical data from the Ministry of Health Malaysia regarding depression shows a worrying trend. The National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) reported that one million individuals aged 16 and above are experiencing depression, which equivalent to 4.6% of Malaysian population. The figure is a concerning rise in mental health issues since it represents a doubling of cases since 2019 with 2.3% Malaysians aged 16 and above was reported with depression symptoms.

Furthermore, a study by Mohamad and Mohamed (2020) among students in higher education institutions revealed that 14% of the respondents experienced a high level of depression. Data from World Health Organization (WHO) stated that globally, depression affects approximately 5% of adults, making it a leading cause of disability worldwide. This data indicates an alarming and concerning trend. It also indicated that depression is more prevalent among younger people compared to the older population, with females (5.1%) being more affected than males (3.6%). Therefore, these statistics underscore that depression is a serious issue, particularly when the occurrences strike adolescent and younger generations. While various factors contribute to this problem, personality traits and perfectionism are among the key factors that lead to depression.

Depression among university students is a significant issue. Past studies have shown that the level of depression among university students is alarming as the university life can be a stressful place for students as they have to go through the period of adjustment and adaptation from adolescence to adulthood (Yang & Koo, 2022). Several factors contribute to depression among students, including year of study, financial issues, living conditions, the presence of other mental health issues such as posttraumatic stress and insomnia, as well as a lack of moral support and interaction with peers and the surrounding environment (Ashraful Islam et al., 2018; Salman et al., 2022). This issue should not be taken lightly, as the consequences of depression can be severe, including suicidal ideation and involving in non-suicidal self-injury.

In addition to the contributing factors of depression, personality traits also play a significant role in influencing depression among students. Personality traits, categorized into five dimensions: Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism can act as either contributing factors and/or protective factors against depression. For instance, Neuroticism has become a synonym trait that linked to psychological distress. Leow et al. (2016) found that among the Big Five personality traits, Neuroticism is one of the key predictors of depressive symptoms, while Extraversion and Conscientiousness were negatively correlated with depression. The associations of Openness to experience and Agreeableness with depression were insignificant. Similarly, Neuroticism has been found to be positively associated with negative emotional states, whereas Agreeableness demonstrates an inverse relationship (Yang & Koo, 2022). Neuroticism is consistently linked to various mental health disorders, particularly depression. Students who score high in Neuroticism are more likely to experience negative emotions such as anxiety, sadness, and irritability. Another study from Pitanupong et al. (2024) also supported that higher levels of Neuroticism were associated with an increased likelihood of developing depressive symptoms. Interestingly, Extraversion is found to be a protector against the depressive symptoms (Gramstad et al., 2015). It is also aligned with a study by Lyon et al. (2020) that Neuroticism traits increase the risk of developing depression. Therefore, it shows that the uniqueness of individuals can significantly affect their mental and emotional well-being. Hence, this highlights the importance of studying the influence of personality traits on depression to better understand students' personality traits and how they perceive depression.

Perfectionism also plays a key role in depression. According to Tran and Rimes (2017), individuals with unhealthy or maladaptive perfectionism are more likely to develop depressive symptoms as they have negative emotions and emotional suppressions when facing challenging situations. This is further supported from studies conducted by Koutra, Mouatsou, and Psoma (2023) as well as Tian and Hou (2022), who found that maladaptive perfectionism is significantly associated with psychological distress. Individuals with higher levels of negative perfectionism tend to experience reduced mental well-being, increased negative affect, and more frequent symptoms of depression. Similarly, a study by Smith et al. (2020) revealed that individuals with perfectionistic concerns are prone to the risk of depression as they tend to engage in critical and harsh self-evaluation. Therefore, perfectionism can be one of the significant factors contributing to depression. Students might experience high pressure and become competitive within their learning environment, dealing with evaluation and grading systems from the university, as well as involvement in extracurricular activities. These factors may lead to unhealthy comparison with peers, which consequently result in developing perfectionism tendencies that may escalate into psychological distress, including depression and stress (Eley et al., 2020). Thus, personality traits, perfectionism and depression can be seen as interrelated topics although many previous studies have examined them separately. Past studies have shown that perfectionism can lead to depression. The relations between personality traits and depression also need to be highlighted as personality can also predict depression.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of personality traits (Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism) on depression, as well as the influence of perfectionism on depression among undergraduate university students. This focus is particularly important as the influence of personality traits and perfectionism on depressive symptoms remains unclear, particularly among Malaysian undergraduate students. Unlike the study by Eley et al. (2020) which explored psychological distress as a whole, this study specifically concentrates on depression.

■ 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Depression is one of the psychological distresses characterized by emotional suffering and symptoms such as loss of interests, persistent sadness and feelings of helplessness (Drapeau et al., 2014). Razzak et al. (2019) stated that depression is a major cause of distress, impacting the quality of life. Individuals suffering from depression are prone to death and comorbidity as it has significance association with suicidal ideation. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), depression is a prevalent and serious mental health condition characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, loss of interest or pleasure in activities, and a range of emotional and physical problem. Depression is diagnosed when an individual exhibits at least five specific symptoms over a two-week period, including either a depressed mood or loss of interest.

There are many theories or models of depression from various perspectives such as humanistic, behavioral, cognitive and psychoanalytic. This study focuses on the cognitive theory of depression developed by Dr. Aaron Beck which is widely used to assess symptoms and severity of depression. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), depression or otherwise known as major depressive disorder or clinical depression is a common mood disorder. Persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness and loss of interest are among symptoms of depression that individuals might experience. Depression not only affects one's mental well-being, but it also presents in physical symptoms such as chronic pain and digestive issues.

Meanwhile, personality has a broad and wide definition. Larsen and Buss (2017) defined personality as individuals' set of psychological traits and mechanisms that are organized and relatively stable over time. Personality also influences how individuals interact and adapt to

the intrapsychic, physical and social environments. Furthermore, personality is the set of psychological traits whereby the traits describe how individuals differ from one another. The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (American Psychological Association, 2020) has defined personality as individual unique differences in characteristics patterns of feeling, thinking and behaving. Hence, personality traits are useful as it helps to explore and understand the dimensions of personalities and differences among individuals.

Traits play an essential role in explaining an individual's behavior. This study focuses on the Five-Factor Model or The Big Five, developed by Robert Mc Crae and Paul Costa (1985). This model includes five dimensions: Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism. Generally, this model is one of the most contemporary and authoritative personality assessment tools as its five dimensions encompass all elements of personality. This study specifically examines these dimensions because of their association with depression. For example, research has shown a positive correlation between Neuroticism and depressive symptoms (Lester, 2021; Smith et al., 2018; Leow et al., 2016; Gramstad et al., 2013).

Furthermore, perfectionism can be described as the tendency of individuals to strive for perfection and being flawless by setting unrealistically high standards or goals, often accompanied by negative self-evaluations (Flett & Hewitt, 1990). Individuals with perfectionistic tend to face internal and external pressures to be perfect in their performances and if they are unable to meet these standards, they perceive themselves as failures (Smith et al., 2018). Hewitt and Flett (1991) proposed that perfectionism is a multidimensional. Based on the perfectionism model by Frost (1990) and Hewitt and Flett (1991), perfectionism manifests in several dimensions.

Frost (1990) conceptualized perfectionism in six dimensions which are concern over mistakes, doubts about actions, personal standards, parental criticism, parental expectations and organization. Individuals with perfectionistic are often perceived as problematic and self-centered, attempting to control situations or others. However, according to Eley et al. (2020), perfectionism can manifest in either healthy and adaptive or self-defeating and maladaptive. For instance, healthy perfectionism can be manifested by a strong sense of responsibility when completing a task. Additionally, adaptive perfectionism is also associated with a desire for success and goal-oriented behavior (Thomas & Bigatti, 2020). In other words, maladaptive perfectionism means individuals that have excessive fear of failure due to the need to hide their imperfections. Past studies show that individuals with perfectionism are more vulnerable to experience increased depressive symptoms (Smith et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2018).

In summary, this study highlights the complex interplay between depression, personality traits, and perfectionism, emphasizing the influence of personality traits and maladaptive perfectionism as key factors contributing to depressive symptoms. The hypotheses of this study are as follows:

- H₀₁ There is no significant influence of Openness to experience on depression among undergraduate students.
- H₀₂ There is no significant influence of Conscientiousness on depression among undergraduate students.
- H₀₃ There is no significant influence of Extraversion on depression among undergraduate students.
- H₀₄ There is no significant influence of Agreeableness on depression among undergraduate students.
- H₀₅ There is no significant influence of Neuroticism on depression among undergraduate students.
- H₀₆ There is no significant influence of Perfectionism on depression among undergraduate students.

■3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample and Procedure

This study employed convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique used to collect data from a population that is readily accessible to the researcher. This approach was chosen as it facilitated easy access to participants from a specific subset of the population. The target population comprised third- and fourth-year undergraduate students enrolled in one of the programs under the faculty of social sciences at a Malaysian university. The total population size was 175 students. This study sample consisted of 110 undergraduate students, determined based on the Morgan and Krejcie table (1970) which recommends a sample size of approximately 118 for a population of 170.

3.2 Measures

3.2.1 The Big Five Inventory (BFI)

The BFI was developed by Lewis R. Goldberg in 1993, consists of 44-items measuring five domains which are openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism (Goldberg, 1993). This inventory used a 5-Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. A study by Muhamad et al. (2018) using the Malay version of the BFI demonstrated acceptable reliability for use with Malaysian public university students. The reliability and validity of the BFI from past studies indicate that this instrument is suitable for use in the Malaysian population. In this study, the pilot test conducted on the BFI also reported Cronbach's alpha values ranging between .65 to .78 for the personality traits.

3.2.2 Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS)

The Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS) was developed by Dr Randy Frost and his colleagues in 1990 to measure participants' perfectionism behavior. This instrument consisted of four subscales measuring (i) concern over mistakes and doubt about actions, (ii) excessive concern with parental expectations and evaluation, (iii) excessively high personal standards and (iv) concern with precision, order and organization. The scale comprises 35-items with 5 Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree (Frost et al., 1990). In this study, the pilot test conducted on the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale indicates the Cronbach's alpha values of .94.

3.2.3 Beck Depression Inventory (BDI)

The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) was developed by Dr Aaron T. Beck, a psychiatrist from University of California in 1961 for assessing symptoms of depression. The BDI is a self-report inventory, consisting of 21-items, rating from 0 to 3 indicating the severity and intensity of depression symptoms over the past two weeks (Beck et al., 1961). The BDI inventory has high internal consistency ranging from .73 to .92 and alpha coefficients of .86 for psychiatric population whereas .81 for non-psychiatric populations (Wang & Goreinsten, 2021). The pilot test conducted on the BDI indicates the Cronbach's alpha values of .97.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data collected from questionnaires was analyzed using a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. Normality test was conducted before analyzing the data. A few outliers were identified and removed during the analysis process. Outliers were detected through the z-score values for bias (skewness) and kurtosis calculated using SPSS Data was considered acceptable if it fell within the range of +1.96 to -1.96. From the initial 110 respondents, four cases were identified as outliers and subsequently removed, resulting in a final sample size of 106 respondents for further analysis.

Descriptive statistics were conducted to analyze mean scores, standard deviations, frequencies and percentages to provide quantitative data from the questionnaires. The results from this descriptive analysis provided information about the depressive symptoms among the respondents. For inferential statistics, multiple regression analysis was used to predict the influence of personality traits on depression, and a simple regression was employed to identify the influence of perfectionism on depression among the respondents. This analysis allowed for an understanding of how each independent variable uniquely and collectively contributed to variations in depression levels.

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Demographic

Table 1 presents the demographic information for this study. A total of 106 from one of the faculties in a Malaysian university participated in this study. 76 participants (71.7%) were female, while 30 participants (28.3%) were male, indicating that the majority of respondents were female. All participants were third- and fourth-year students with the majority being third-year students (50.9%), while 49.1% were fourth-year students. This demographic breakdown provides a clear representation of the study's sample population.

Table 1 Demographic information

Demographic Information (n=115)		f	(%)
Gender	Male	30	28.3
	Female	76	71.7
Year of Study	Third Year	54	50.9
	Fourth Year	52	49.1

4.1 Personality Traits, Perfectionism and Depression

Table 2 presents the findings of the personality traits, perfectionism and depression among undergraduate students. For personality traits, the majority of students reported moderate levels across personality traits: Openness to experience (92.5%, M=3.05), Conscientiousness (98.0%, M=2.95), Extraversion (81.1%, mean = 2.59), Agreeableness (86.6%, M=2.67), and Neuroticism (53.7%, M=2.43). For perfectionism, most students (93.6%) reported high levels, with a mean score of 3.86. In contrast, for depression, the majority (96.2%) exhibited low levels, with a mean score of 2.17. These findings highlight that while students generally exhibited moderate levels across personality traits, perfectionism was predominantly high and depression levels were largely low.

Table 2 Personality traits, perfectionism and depression

Variables	Level			Mean score	Level
	Low f(%)	Moderate f(%)	High f(%)		
Personality					
Openness to experience	1 (0.9)	98 (92.5)	7 (6.4)	3.05	Moderate
Conscientiousness	1 (0.9)	104 (98.0)	1 (0.9)	2.95	Moderate
Extraversion	20 (18.8)	86 (81.1)	0	2.59	Moderate
Agreeableness	14 (13.2)	92 (86.6)	0	2.67	Moderate
Neuroticism	43 (34.8)	63 (53.7)	0	2.43	Moderate
Perfectionism	1 (0.9)	6 (5.5)	100 (93.6)	3.86	High
Depression	102 (96.2)	3 (2.7)	1 (0.9)	2.17	Low

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

4.3 Influence of Personality Traits on Depression

Table 3 shows the influence of personality traits on depression. The results indicate that Openness to experience and Agreeableness and Neuroticism have a significant influence on depression, with p -values of $<.05$. Neuroticism had the highest positive contribution, accounting for 21.4% of the variance in depression [$R^2 = .214$, $F = 28.024$, $p = .000$]. This indicates that higher levels of Neuroticism are associated with increased depression levels. Meanwhile, Agreeableness contributed 13.7% to depression [$R^2 = .137$, $F = 16.347$, $p = .000$] and Openness to experience accounted for 4.3% [$R^2 = .043$, $F = 4.632$, $p = .034$], both with negative Beta values suggesting that higher levels of these traits are associated with lower depression levels. However, the study found that Conscientiousness and Extraversion did not significantly influence depressive symptoms. These findings highlight that not all personality traits equally contribute to depression, with specific traits like neuroticism being the most impactful.

Table 3 Influence of personality on depression among undergraduate students

Variables	Depression					
	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Unstandardized B (Beta)	p	F
Personality						
Openness to experience	.207	.043	.034	-.309	.034*	4.632
Conscientiousness	.125	.016	.006	.276	.203	1.643
Extraversion	.155	.024	.015	.335	.114	2.540
Agreeableness	.370	.137	.129	-.882	.000*	16.347
Neuroticism	.462	.214	.206	1.085	.000*	28.024

* Significant ($p \leq 0.5$)

In conclusion, the hypothesis for H_{01} , H_{04} and H_{05} of this study are rejected, indicating significant influences of Openness to experience, Agreeableness and Neuroticism on depression. However, there is no significant influence of Conscientiousness and Extraversion on depression, making the formulated hypothesis (H_{02} and H_{03}) of this study are remained.

4.4 Influence of Perfectionism on Depression

Table 4 presents the analysis of the influence of perfectionism on depression among undergraduate students. The findings show a positive significant influence of perfectionism on depression, with a p -value of $<.05$. Perfectionism accounted for 32.6% of the variance in depression [$R^2 = .326$, $F = 49.921$, $p < .05$], with a highly significant p -value of .000. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant influence of perfectionism on depression among respondents, leading to the rejection of H_{06} .

Table 4 Influence of perfectionism on depression among undergraduate students

Variable	Depression					
	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Unstandardized B (Beta)	p	F
Perfectionism	.571	.326	.320	.284	.000*	49.921

* Significant ($p \leq 0.5$)

5.0 DISCUSSION

5.1 Personality, Perfectionism and Depression

The result of this study shows that in personality traits, the students obtain moderate levels in all dimensions (Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion and Agreeableness). The finding is contradicted to research by Robinson et al. (2021) that has a high level of Neuroticism and Conscientiousness.

Moreover, the findings also revealed that the students' level of perfectionism is high. This aligns with a study by Curran and Hill (2022) that indicated a rise in perfectionism among young adults. Similarly, undergraduate medical students were also found to exhibit high levels of perfectionism (Eley et al., 2020). These findings suggest a consistent pattern of high perfectionism among young adults. Based on the findings, high levels of perfectionism among undergraduate students might be caused from several factors. Perfectionistic individuals have the tendency to have excessive expectations, compare themselves with peers, experience feelings of failure and overly focus on poor grades or performance (Eley et al., 2020). In this study, as the third- and fourth-year students are engaged in internships and final-year projects, it might affect the perfectionism level. However, perfectionism is not necessarily equated with negative outcomes. Individuals with perfectionistic also have the tendency to become an adaptive high achiever due to its linked with Conscientiousness. Thus, it helps individuals to overcome procrastination, build self-efficacy and achieve higher life satisfaction (Melrose, 2011).

The study also illustrates a high level of depression among undergraduate students. This finding aligns with previous studies that reported a high level of depression among university students (Ahmed et al., 2020; Ranizal et al., 2019; Ashraf Islam et al., 2018) with various contributing factors. One significant factor is the advanced year of study (Angelone et al., 2011). Depression among university students is not a new phenomenon and can arise from various factors. The post-pandemic also has further influenced the trend of depression among students such as lack of interaction and feelings of loneliness, insufficient moral support, fear of poor academic performance or grades, financial challenges and family background (Salman et al., 2022). However, in this study, the findings reveal a low level of depression among undergraduate students that may indicate the presence of factors that help mitigate depression.

5.2 Influence of Personality Traits on Depression

The finding of this study revealed that only three traits which are Openness to experience, Agreeableness and Neuroticism significantly influence depressive symptoms, whereas Conscientiousness and Extraversion have an insignificant influence. This result aligns with the study by Gramstad et al. (2013) in which Neuroticism trait has a significant correlation with depression and anxiety. Similarly, a study by Ho et al. (2022) suggested the Neuroticism predicts a positive relationship with depression, whereas Conscientiousness and Extraversion negatively predict depressive symptoms.

In addition, the findings are consistent with a study by Leow et al. (2016), which reported that among the Big Five personality traits, Neuroticism has a significant correlation with depressive symptoms. In contrast, Lester (2021) revealed different results in which Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism are personality traits that have significant association with depression. Nevertheless, despite differing findings, previous studies consistently suggest that Neuroticism is a key trait influencing depression. Lester (2021) explained that individuals with high Neuroticism often developed maladaptive behaviors resulting in unhealthy patterns in interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, which can lead to depression. Besides that, high Neuroticism also indicates a lower capability in regulating negative emotions, further increasing the risk of depression. Jourdy and Petot (2017) found that Neuroticism is associated with depressive symptoms, while the other dimensions of personality traits have no association with depression.

Openness to experience and Agreeableness also negatively influence depressive symptoms. Openness to experience reflects individuals who are more open to new experiences and may be better equipped to handle stressors, potentially mitigating depressive symptoms. Conversely, individuals with lower openness may exhibit less interest in certain things, unwilling to engage in new experiences or adventures and a high level of mental rigidity which are characteristics of depressed individuals (Jourdy and Petot, 2017). The findings related to Agreeableness suggest that individuals who are more cooperative and trusting may experience less depression, likely due to positive interpersonal relationships that act as a buffer against stress.

Extraversion has no significant influence on depression, as positive relationship with peers and a supportive environment lower the risk of developing depressive symptoms (Leow et al., 2016). Conscientiousness, on the other hand is associated with effective coping strategies, thus diminishing its influence on depression (Kim et al., 2016). These findings highlight the significant role that personality traits play in influencing the likelihood of depression.

5.3 Influence of Perfectionism on Depression

The findings of this study suggest that perfectionism has a significant influence on depression among undergraduate students. This aligns with a study by Smith et al. (2020) which identified perfectionism as a predictor of depressive symptoms. Smith et al. (2020) further reported that individuals with perfectionistic concerns have positive relationships with depressive symptoms, while perfectionistic strivings contribute to small positive relationships with depression. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that individuals with perfectionist tendencies who set unnecessarily high expectations for themselves and critically view themselves may lead to harmful health effects, including depression. In addition, a study on the dimension of perfectionism, socially-prescribed perfectionism shows a positive relationship in depression among undergraduate students (Smith et al., 2018) due to the sense of disappointment and approval from others, which result in depressed feelings when expectations are unmet. According to Lessin and Pardo (2017), perfectionism is a major risk factor for depression and other mental health issues such as anxiety. Thus, it can be concluded that perfectionism significantly influences depression and poses a considerable risk to mental health.

5.4 Implications, Limitations and Recommendations

The findings of this study reveal the low level of depression and high level of perfectionism among respondents. Therefore, proactive actions need to be taken in order to address the perfectionism issue before it escalates into more severe psychological issues. Since perfectionism has been shown to influence depressive symptoms, universities should prioritize interventions, as depression can lead to severe consequences such as self-harm or suicide. University authorities can create awareness programs or events focusing on mental health interventions to maintain students mental, physical and emotional well-being. By addressing perfectionism and its associated risks, such programs can contribute to improving students' overall well-being and academic success. Additionally, the influence of personality traits such as Openness to Experience, Agreeableness and Neuroticism also further underscores the need for tailored interventions to ensure comprehensive and effective support for students. University counselling centers can also create support group programs or group counselling for students facing similar issues.

Although this study provides new insights into the influence of personality traits and perfectionism on depressive symptoms among undergraduate students, it has certain limitations. For instance, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all undergraduate students as the sample included specific groups, excluding students from other programs and first- and second-year students. Differences in personality traits, perfectionism, and depression across academic disciplines and study years could yield varying results. In addition, the use

of online platforms for data collection was a limitation. Researchers did not have the opportunity for direct communication with respondents, which hindered their ability to assist, observe or clarify any confusion respondents may have experienced while answering the questionnaires.

For future research, it is recommended to use a larger sample size to ensure the reliability of the findings and to include undergraduate students from diverse courses. This approach will provide richer insights and allow for the findings to be generalized to a broader population within the university. Future researchers also can conduct a mixed-method study to explore the quantitative relationships between personality traits, perfectionism and depression while gaining deeper qualitative insights into the underlying experiences and perspectives of students.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the influence of personality traits (Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism) and perfectionism on depression among undergraduate university students. The findings reveal a moderate level in each personality trait, high level of perfectionism and low level of depression among the respondents. The results also indicate that personality traits such Openness to experience, Agreeableness and Neuroticism significantly influence depressive symptoms. Additionally, the study highlights the influence of perfectionism on depression. Therefore, the findings of this study emphasize the need for collective efforts to address this issue and take proactive measures to prevent it from worsening. University administrators, authorities and counsellors need to collaborate to implement effective interventions and support systems for students. As young adults are the backbone of the nation, it is crucial to ensure their well-being not only physically but also mentally and emotionally.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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