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A Literature Review of the Relationship Between Big Five Personality Traits and Adolescent Well-Being

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Abstract. This study systematically reviews the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and adolescent well-being. Key findings indicate that: (1) Extraversion and conscientiousness consistently predict higher levels of well-being, while neuroticism shows a stable negative association; (2) The effects of agreeableness and openness are highly context-dependent, with their strength and direction moderated by collectivist versus individualist cultural frameworks; (3) Analyses of underlying mechanisms identify self-esteem and social support as key mediating variables; and (4) Cultural factors significantly moderate the pathways linking personality traits to well-being. This synthesis integrates empirical evidence on the Big Five personality traits and adolescent well-being, providing a personality psychology foundation for the development of mental health interventions. Future research should prioritize long-term longitudinal studies and further investigation into the psychological mechanisms through which these traits influence adolescent well-being.

Keywords: Big Five personality traits, Well-being, Adolescent

1. Introduction

In recent years, adolescent mental health has become a major global concern. Research indicates that adolescents often exhibit lower levels of well-being [1]. Well-being is essential for healthy adolescent development, influencing academic performance [2], social skills, and future quality of life. Adolescents with higher levels of well-being tend to achieve greater academic success, form stronger peer relationships, and experience more stable careers and marriages in adulthood. Moreover, well-being is closely linked to societal stability and sustainable development [3]. The stability and prosperity of a society depend on the well-being of its citizens, and adolescent well-being directly impacts social harmony and progress. As such, enhancing adolescent well-being and promoting mental health have become pressing social issues.

Among existing research directions, exploring adolescent well-being through the lens of personality traits has gained significant attention. For instance, one study found that adolescents' attachments to their parents—specifically communication, trust, and involvement—were significant predictors of well-being, even after controlling for age, gender, and certain personality traits [4]. Another study found that extraversion and conscientiousness, two dimensions of the Big Five personality traits, were positively associated with adolescent well-being, while neuroticism showed

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a negative association [5]. A further study revealed that extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness were positively related to adolescent well-being, whereas neuroticism remained negatively related [6]. Collectively, these findings suggest that the Big Five personality traits have garnered substantial scholarly interest in the context of adolescent well-being.

Despite these valuable insights, existing studies remain fragmented and lack a comprehensive, systematic review. This gap makes it difficult to form a cohesive understanding of how the Big Five personality traits relate to adolescent well-being. To address this issue, the present study aims to systematically review the existing literature and propose future research directions. This synthesis will provide a strong foundation for subsequent research exploring the complex relationship between personality traits and adolescent well-being.

2. Concept definition

2.1. Big five personality traits

The Big Five personality traits constitute a widely recognized psychological model that describes individual differences across five dimensions: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness [7,8]. Neuroticism reflects emotional instability and a tendency toward negative emotions. Individuals with high levels of neuroticism are more prone to anxiety, depression, and difficulty maintaining composure under stress [9]. Extraversion relates to energy and sociability. Highly extraverted individuals are outgoing, enthusiastic, and energized by social interactions, actively seeking opportunities to engage with others [10]. Openness to experience captures intellectual curiosity and creativity. Individuals high in openness value novel ideas, artistic expression, and new experiences, often displaying flexible thinking and imaginative insight [10]. Agreeableness pertains to interpersonal warmth and cooperativeness. High scorers tend to prioritize harmonious relationships, show trust in others, and demonstrate empathy, helpfulness, and compassion [7]. Conscientiousness involves self-discipline, organization, and a strong sense of responsibility. Individuals high in conscientiousness are goal-oriented, diligent, reliable, and capable of sustained effort toward achieving objectives [9]. As a foundational model in personality psychology, the Big Five has a solid theoretical basis and broad applicability across disciplines, including psychology, education, and organizational behavior. It provides a comprehensive framework for understanding individual differences in personality and behavior.

2.2. Well-being

Well-being refers to an individual's subjective evaluation of life quality and encompasses both emotional and cognitive components. Emotionally, it involves the balance between positive and negative affect. Positive affect includes experiences of joy, contentment, and enthusiasm, whereas negative affect encompasses emotions such as anxiety, sadness, and anger [11,12]. Cognitively, well-being is often assessed through life satisfaction, which reflects an individual's overall evaluation of life circumstances, including satisfaction with work, relationships, health, and other key domains. Busseri and Erb conceptualize well-being as comprising life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect, offering a multidimensional and dynamic framework. They emphasize that well-being is not a static trait but a malleable state that fluctuates in response to life events and personal growth [3]. Similarly, Anglim and Horwood support the tripartite model and investigate the influence of personality on well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings suggest that traits such as extraversion and conscientiousness can buffer against stress and enhance resilience,

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thereby promoting higher levels of well-being during challenging times [13]. These studies affirm the multifaceted nature of well-being and its strong connection to personality traits, offering valuable insights for both academic research and practical interventions aimed at enhancing adolescent well-being.

3. Big five personality and adolescent well-being

3.1. The direct effect

The Big Five personality traits are closely associated with adolescent well-being. A review of existing literature reveals that extraversion, neuroticism, and conscientiousness exhibit relatively stable relationships with adolescent well-being, while the associations involving openness and agreeableness appear less consistent and more context-dependent.

Extraversion demonstrates a consistently positive correlation with adolescent well-being. For example, Butković et al. conducted a cross-age study showing that adolescents with high levels of extraversion exhibited stronger social connectedness and more frequent expressions of positive emotion compared to older adults, thereby significantly enhancing their overall life satisfaction and emotional well-being [14]. Research conducted in culturally diverse contexts—such as China, Turkey, and the Czech Republic—has also confirmed the positive role of extraversion in promoting well-being, even across varying cultural settings [15]. In particular, extraversion appears especially beneficial in collectivist cultures, where it facilitates group integration and social belonging, which in turn contribute to enhanced well-being.

Neuroticism has a consistently negative impact on adolescent well-being and is widely recognized as a core driver of negative emotions. This effect is especially pronounced during adolescence. García, using a dual-path model, found that adolescents high in neuroticism were more likely to activate the “stress-fragility” pathway, resulting in exaggerated stress responses and a heightened frequency of negative emotional experiences [5]. Additionally, in contexts of family conflict, the detrimental effects of neuroticism on well-being become even more apparent, illustrating the trait’s interaction with environmental stressors [16].

Conscientiousness enhances adolescent well-being primarily through goal achievement and self-regulation. In a cross-cultural study involving adolescents from six countries, Vazsonyi et al. found that conscientiousness had a consistently positive effect on academic achievement, which in turn contributed to higher life satisfaction [15]. Notably, this effect was stronger in individualistic Western cultures compared to collectivist Eastern cultures, suggesting that cultural values may moderate the strength of this relationship.

Agreeableness has a more variable relationship with adolescent well-being, largely shaped by cultural context. In a study of Greek adolescents, agreeableness indirectly promoted well-being by enhancing family harmony and interpersonal relationships [16]. However, Vazsonyi et al. reported that the correlation between agreeableness and well-being was significantly weaker in collectivist cultures than in individualist ones [15]. This suggests that collectivist norms may suppress the positive effects of agreeableness on well-being, possibly due to social expectations around conformity and relational obligations.

Openness to experience has the weakest and most inconsistent association with adolescent well-being. Butković et al. found only a weak correlation between openness and positive affect in adolescents [14]. Similarly, Vazsonyi et al. noted that the impact of openness on well-being varied across national contexts, underscoring the influence of cultural background on this relationship [15].

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3.2. Internal mechanism

Joshanloo and Afshari conducted a study on Iranian Muslim adolescents and found that neuroticism indirectly reduced life satisfaction by lowering self-esteem, while extraversion enhanced positive emotions by increasing self-esteem. These findings suggest that self-esteem serves as a key mediator in the relationship between Big Five personality traits and subjective well-being [17]. Similarly, Yu et al., in a study of Chinese participants, found that agreeableness enhanced happiness by increasing perceived social support, whereas extraversion exerted its influence through a sequential pathway of "social network breadth → perceived support." This mediating model had a stronger effect in the adolescent subgroup, underscoring the pivotal role of social skills during adolescence [18].

Joshanloo and Afshari also identified the moderating influence of religious culture. Among Iranian Muslim adolescents, religious commitment significantly strengthened the positive association between agreeableness and happiness, while it weakened the relationship between openness and life satisfaction. Furthermore, the study revealed gender differences: female students reported significantly higher life satisfaction than their male counterparts, and the positive relationship between conscientiousness and life satisfaction was found to be stronger for females [17]. In the context of rural Chinese adolescents, high levels of collectivism were found to enhance the positive effect of agreeableness on happiness, while simultaneously intensifying the negative impact of neuroticism. This pattern is attributed to the emotional restraint imposed by collectivist cultural norms, highlighting the moderating role of collectivism in the personality–well-being relationship [18].

4. Discussion

4.1. Conclusions of the study

The relationship between the Big Five personality traits and adolescent well-being has long been a focal point in psychological research. This study systematically reviews and synthesizes existing literature on the topic. First, it clarifies the conceptual definitions of the Big Five personality traits and well-being. Second, it explores their relationship from both the perspective of direct effects and underlying psychological mechanisms. Finally, drawing on the reviewed findings, this study outlines directions for future research aimed at advancing this field.

4.2. Directions for future research

Based on the current literature review, several promising directions for future research on the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and adolescent well-being have been identified. These directions not only address existing gaps in the literature but also aim to deepen our understanding of the psychological mechanisms and contextual factors that influence this relationship. Future studies should consider the following:

4.2.1. Longitudinal and developmental perspectives

While existing studies have provided valuable cross-sectional insights, they fall short in capturing the dynamic and developmental nature of personality and well-being during adolescence—a period characterized by rapid psychological, social, and biological changes. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to track the trajectories of both personality traits and well-being over time. Such approaches would help clarify the directionality of these relationships (e.g., whether personality

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traits predict well-being or vice versa), identify critical developmental periods when personality exerts the greatest influence, and assess the stability or malleability of both traits and well-being outcomes across adolescence. Moreover, longitudinal data would allow researchers to investigate how life transitions—such as school changes, evolving family dynamics, or shifting peer relationships—moderate the relationship between personality and well-being. These insights could contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the developmental pathways linking personality to adolescent mental health.

4.2.2. Deeper exploration of mediating mechanisms

Although existing studies have begun to identify mediating variables such as self-esteem and social support, the internal mechanisms through which personality traits influence adolescent well-being remain underexplored. Future research should aim to develop more comprehensive theoretical models incorporating a broader array of mediators, including emotional regulation strategies, coping styles, identity development, and perceived autonomy. For instance, conscientiousness may promote well-being not only through academic success but also by enhancing self-regulation and goal-setting behaviors. Similarly, neuroticism may impair well-being by increasing emotional reactivity and the use of maladaptive coping strategies. Investigating these mediating processes would help unpack the "black box" between personality and well-being and offer more targeted insights for designing effective psychological interventions.

4.2.3. Contextual and cultural moderators

Although the influence of cultural and contextual factors on the personality–well-being relationship is increasingly acknowledged, it remains insufficiently understood. Future studies should examine how cultural dimensions—such as collectivism versus individualism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance—moderate the effects of personality traits on adolescent well-being. For example, agreeableness may be more strongly associated with well-being in collectivist cultures that emphasize harmony and interdependence, whereas its benefits may be less pronounced in individualist cultures that prioritize assertiveness and competition. In addition, contextual variables such as family structure, school climate, socioeconomic status, and peer dynamics should be explored as potential moderators. Understanding these boundary conditions is essential for developing culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate interventions that resonate with adolescents' lived experiences and sociocultural environments.

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