

How to Cite:

Gupta, S., Shalini, L., & Khokhar, C. P. (2021). The silver lining behind the clouds: Personality traits and gratitude as predictors of coping style among doctors. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 5(S1), 792–802. <https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6nS5.10624>

The silver lining behind the clouds: Personality traits and gratitude as predictors of coping style among doctors

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Abstract---Personality of doctors plays an important role in their services. Present study examined the relationship between Big Five personality dimensions, Gratitude and Coping among Doctors. A total of 140 doctors were selected for this study. To select the sample for this study 9 hospitals located in city of Haridwar were approached. Data were collected using research tools GQ-6 Questionnaire, NEO-FFI Inventory and Coping Strategies scale were used. To analyse the data, a Pearson-correlation and linear regression analysis were conducted by using SPSS-20. The results demonstrated that neuroticism promotes avoidance coping and demotes approach coping, openness and conscientiousness demotes avoidance coping and promote approach coping. Neuroticism is negatively correlated but openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness are positively correlated with gratitude. Gratitude is negatively associated with avoidance coping. Regression analysis revealed that neuroticism is negative predictor but conscientiousness is positive predictor of approach coping, and Gratitude is negative predictor of avoidance coping. The present study provides a better understanding of the role of personality traits, gratitude and its relation to coping strategies may allow for more targeted and effective psychological interventions for doctors so that they can effectively choose approach coping rather than avoidance coping and also helps to inculcate positivity.

Keywords---Coping, Big-5 Personality traits, Gratitude, Doctors.

Introduction

In present pandemic of COVID-19 this statement has become more relevant. The demands of the job and patients' expectations have made this job more interfering with family life, constant interruptions at home and work, and the stresses of practice administration. During such stressful situation, practitioners may use several coping styles to maintain homeostasis. Coping is a process that we as individuals employ every day. We engage in coping when we feel under stress or want to manage a taxing situation. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), there are mainly two types of coping strategies that people employ when attempting to resolve or remove a stressor: approach / problem-focused coping, avoidance / emotion-focused coping. Approach coping involves altering or managing the problem that is causing the stress and is highly action focused. In avoidant coping people involves in cognitive and behavioural efforts directed towards minimizing, denying or ignoring dealing with a stressful situation (Holahan, Moos, Brennan & Schutte, 2005).

Personality plays a significant role in decision making and problem solving. Many contemporary personality psychologists believe that there are five basic dimensions of personality, often referred to as the "Big 5" personality traits which determines the reaction pattern of a person in a specific situation. The five personality traits are neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness. Neuroticism is related to being anxious, irritable, temperamental and moody. Extraversion means being outgoing, sociable, talkative, and enjoying social situations. Openness means curious, intellectual, original, creative and open to new ideas. In agreeableness people generally more affable, trusted, kind, tolerant, sensitive and warm while being conscientious means organized, systematic, punctual, achievement oriented and dependable (Cherry, 2019). These personality traits interact with the human experiences and generates a unique behaviour pattern in a specific situation and approach toward the life, work and responsibility. Gratitude is the one much studied in positive psychology.

Gratitude is derived from the Latin *gratia*, meaning grace, graciousness, or gratefulness. All derivatives from the Latin root" have to do with kindness, generousness, gifts, the beauty of giving and receiving, or getting something for nothing" (Pruyser, 1976). A person with high gratitude may take less stress in adversity than low gratitude individual. However, in addition of that he may also be avoidant toward the challenging situation, which may increase the issues further. As discussed in the beginning, medical profession is a stressful and challenging branch, because of the psychological pressure inherent to this process. Alexandros, Davidson and Cooper (2003) based on their study stated that doctors have significantly higher levels of source of pressure than the normative population and other comparative occupational samples. Riley (2004) tried to find out the relationship between stress and personality and proposed that stress in doctors is a product of the interaction between the demanding nature of their work and their obsessive, conscientious, and committed personalities. Similarly, there are several past studies established relationship between traits and coping of people in medical practice. By considering the importance of the role of Gratitude, coping styles and personality traits in medical

profession it become essential to understand the relationship between these variables among doctors, as these are the variables which are playing role to create dedication for a professional in COVID-19.

Present study is conducted to fulfil the following objective:

Objective: To study the relationship between Personality traits, Gratitude and Coping among Doctors.

Hypotheses:

1. There would be significant correlation between personality traits neuroticism, extroversion, openness, Agreeableness and consciousness and gratitude of doctors.
2. There would be significant correlation between personality traits neuroticism, extroversion, openness, Agreeableness and consciousness and approach coping of doctors.
3. There would be significant correlation between personality traits neuroticism, extroversion, openness, Agreeableness and consciousness and avoidance coping of doctors.
4. There would be significant correlation between gratitude and approach and avoidance coping of doctors.
5. Personality traits neuroticism, extroversion, openness, Agreeableness, consciousness and gratitude would be significant predictor of approach coping in doctors.
6. Personality traits neuroticism, extroversion, openness, Agreeableness, consciousness and gratitude would be significant predictor of avoidance coping in doctors.

Methodology

Design: Descriptive correlational design

Sampling: A sample of 140 doctors were selected by using purposive sampling method from government and private hospitals of Haridwar- India as per following inclusion and exclusion criteria:

Inclusion criteria:

- Doctors working in direct contact with patients only.
- Doctors working in any department in hospitals.
- Doctors of male female both genders.
- Minimum one-year work experience.
- Doctors who are not suffering from any serious physical and mental health issues.

Exclusion criteria:

- Physicians who were on teaching assignment only in medical colleges.
- Physicians working as Radiologist in hospitals.
- Physicians who were on emergency duty.
- Physicians who were not interested in participation in study.

Description of the sample is given in following table:

Table 1: Distribution of the sample (N=140)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Valid percentage
Gender	Male	82	58.6
	Female	58	41.4
Rank	Junior Residents	47	33.6
	Senior Residents	10	7.1
	Above Senior Residence	83	59.3
Marital status	Unmarried	40	28.6
	Married	93	66.4
	Divorced/ Widow/ Separated	7	5.0

Measure:

1. *Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6)*: The Gratitude Questionnaire-6 developed by McCullough et al. (2002) was used to assess gratitude. Participants rated six statements on a 7-point rating scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Each statement assesses how frequently and intensely participants experience gratitude (e.g., “I am grateful to a wide variety of people”, and “I feel thankful for what I have received in life”). Psychometric property of scale demonstrating a robust factor structure (through EFA, and four CFAs), convergent validity with peer reports, discriminate validity from related traits, and high internal consistency ($\alpha = .82$) (McCullough et al., 2002).

2. *Coping Strategies Scale*: Coping strategies scale is developed by A. K. Srivastav (2001). The scale comprises 50 items, to be rated on five-point scale. It assesses two types of coping behaviour: approach coping and avoidance coping. The reliability of the “Coping Strategies Scale” was determined by Test-Retest Method (0.92) and Split-half method (Approach Coping Strategies: 0.78 and Avoidance Coping strategies: 0.69).

3. *NEO-Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI)*: Neo Five factor Inventory Form developed by Costa and McCrae (1992). The Neo Five Factor inventory form comprised of 60 questions. Answer is to be recorded on the five-point likert scale, strongly agree to strongly disagree. It was based on the big five personality trait which has five major dimensions a) Neuroticism, b) Extroversion, c) Openness to experience, d) Agreeableness, e) Conscientiousness. The reliability of the NEO-FFI had been established by evaluating the Cronbach’s-alpha reliability coefficients. The values of the coefficient are 0.90, 0.78, 0.76, 0.86 and 0.90 for the dimensions of neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness, respectively. These values are high enough (0.76 and more) to reflect on the reliability of the inventory.

Procedure:

To select the sample for this study 9 hospitals located in city of Haridwar were approached. Permission taken from the head of the hospitals and institutes to collect the data. A list of doctors working in the hospitals was prepared. Doctors were screened as per inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study sample. After

selecting the relevant sample participants were given detailed information about the study. They were assured for the confidentiality of the information and Informed consent was taken to use the data for research purpose only, whoever agreed to participate in study. All three research tools GQ-6 Questionnaire, NEO-FFI Inventory and Coping Strategies scale were given to participant to fill in one session.

Results

Scoring of GQ-6 Questionnaire, NEO-FFI Inventory and Coping Strategies scale were done as per the instruction given in the manual. After quantifying the responses, correlation and multiple regression between the variables were calculated by using SPSS-20. Mean, Standard deviation and Standard error of Personality traits, Gratitude and Coping styles are given in following table:

Table 2: Mean, Standard deviation and Standard error of Personality traits, Gratitude and Coping styles (N=140)

Variables	Mean	σ	SE _m
Neuroticism	22.20	9.40	.79
Extraversion	27.63	8.37	.70
Openness	25.64	5.92	.50
Agreeableness	27.66	5.58	.47
Conscientiousness	31.75	7.88	.66
Gratitude	32.35	5.72	.48
Approach coping	71.72	10.41	.88
Avoidance coping	40.32	12.05	1.01

To examine the association between personality traits, Gratitude and coping styles, Pearson's correlations were obtained for the whole sample.

Table 3: Correlation between personality traits, gratitude and coping styles (N=140)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1) Neuroticism	1	-.339**	-.357**	-.356**	-.340**	-.182*	-.339**	.178*
(2) Extraversion		1	.486**	.322**	.472**	.059	.112	-.160
(3) Openness			1	.295**	.431**	.216*	.197*	-.240**
(4) Agreeableness				1	.318**	.234**	.102	-.073
(5) Conscientiousness					1	.279**	.275**	-.180*
(6) Gratitude						1	.125	-.252**
(7) Approach coping							1	-.061
(8) Avoidance coping								1

Note:

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The result depicted that there was significant negative relationship between personality trait Neuroticism with Gratitude ($r = -.182$, $p < .05$) and approach coping ($r = -.339$, $p < .01$). Neuroticism relationship was positive with avoidance

coping ($r = .178, p < .05$). The trait Openness to experience was positively associated with gratitude ($r = .216, p < .05$), approach coping ($r = .197, p < .05$) and negative with avoidance coping ($r = -.240, p < .01$). The trait Agreeableness was positively associated with Gratitude ($r = .234, p < .01$). Analysis of trait Conscientiousness with gratitude depicted positive correlation ($r = .279, p < .01$) and also supported positive correlation with approach coping strategy ($r = .275, p < .01$) and negative with avoidance coping ($r = -.180, p < .05$). While correlation is checked with gratitude and different coping strategies, gratitude is found to be negatively associated with avoidance coping ($r = -.252, p < .01$) and insignificant correlation with approach coping. Multiple Regression analysis and Summary tables of Regression Coefficient of approach and avoidance coping are given in following tables:

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis predicting approach coping from Gratitude, Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness (N= 140)

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients <i>B</i>	Standardized Coefficients β	<i>p</i> - value
Neuroticism	-.329	-.297	.001**
Extraversion	-.122	-.098	.326
Openness	.111	.063	.518
Agreeableness	-.114	-.061	.498
Conscientiousness	.273	.207	.037*
Gratitude	.036	.020	.815
R		.394	
R ²		.155	
F value		F ₍₁₃₄₎ =4.017	

Note: F ratio was 4.076 which was significant beyond 0.001

Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis predicting avoidance coping from Gratitude, Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness (N= 140)

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients <i>B</i>	Standardized Coefficients β	<i>p</i> - value
Neuroticism	.110	.086	.360
Extraversion	-.087	-.060	.557
Openness	-.298	-.146	.144
Agreeableness	.168	.078	.400
Conscientiousness	-.038	-.025	.804
Gratitude	-.448	-.213	.017
R		.336	
R ²		.113	
F value		F ₍₁₃₄₎ =2.812	

Result depicts that Neuroticism ($\beta = -0.297$) shows highly negative impact on approach coping whereas Conscientiousness ($\beta = 0.207$) shows positive impact on approach coping. The value for Neuroticism is ($\beta = -0.297$) and Conscientiousness ($\beta = 0.207$). Gratitude ($\beta = -0.213$) shows negative impact on avoidance coping. The value of gratitude is ($\beta = -0.213$) (Table 5).

Discussion

After analyzing the data, analysis of correlation of gratitude with personality traits revealed that trait neuroticism is negatively correlated with gratitude level of doctors as they scored high in neuroticism. They have a tendency to go deep into the details of situations and deal them with negative emotions which become hurdle to be grateful, therefore doctors scored low on gratitude. Trait openness is found positively correlated with gratitude of doctors. Those scored high in openness to experience, tend to experiment with new ideas and look to live new experiences. They experienced emotions with intensity and are creative and having flexible attitude in adverse situation and helps to maintain positive affect and happiness (Woo et.al, 2015), which may be influence the feeling of thankfulness/gratitude in them. This finding supported by McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002) study but in contrast Ajmal et. al (2016) found that openness have negative impact on gratitude. Next trait, Agreeableness, which includes characteristics such as being good-natured, cooperative, and trustful of others was found to be positively associated with high level of gratefulness among the doctors, it also shows higher levels of positive relations with others. Like agreeableness, conscientiousness includes characteristics of responsibility, hardworking and better decision making. It was also found to be positively correlated with high level of gratitude in doctors. Similar finding reported by the research conducted by Roberts et.al (2014), their study finds that conscientiousness act as a main component in achieving happiness and psychological adjustment in life. Other study reported that highly conscientious people are goal directed and lead to success (Tanksale, 2015). This will make them to be more grateful for their life and they achieved what they want in their life. Present study partially supported the first hypothesis of significant correlation between personality traits neuroticism, extroversion, openness, Agreeableness, consciousness and gratitude of doctors. Extraversion showed no significant correlation with gratitude of doctors.

In this study, the association of five personality traits and coping styles of doctors was also examined. Results showed the trait neuroticism was negatively associated with approach coping styles, and positively with avoidance coping. Doctors those having high neuroticism deals the situations with negative emotions, such as depression, anxiety, nervousness, guilt, and fear, which influences people to produce negative reactions to escape stressful situations (Eby et al., 2005). Some researchers also supported the results through their studies as low neurotic people are more likely to use approach coping styles, while people with high neuroticism tend to rely on avoidance coping styles (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007; Baltes et al., 2011; Fickova, 2009; Hambrick and McCord, 2010). After that in present study we found the adaptive trait Openness was positively associated with approach coping styles of doctors and negatively with avoidance coping of doctors. Openness to new experiences leads individuals to restructure cognition for stressful situations, it is found positively associated with approach coping styles (Fickova, 2009; Hambrick and McCord, 2010). In this study the adaptive trait Conscientiousness which shows tendency to be organized, intentional, and responsible, find to be associated with approach coping in doctors. It allowing them to focus their energy on problem solving, similar result reported by study conducted by Baltes et al. (2011).

Conscientiousness has been negatively correlated with avoidance coping styles (Connor-Smith and Flachsbart, 2007; Fickova, 2009). The findings of present study partially supported the second and third hypothesis of significant correlation between personality traits neuroticism, extroversion, openness, Agreeableness, conscientiousness with approach and avoidance coping. Extraversion showed no significant correlation with approach and avoidance coping.

After this we also examined the relationship between gratitude and coping styles of doctors and found that doctors with high gratitude demote adoption of avoidance coping. People having high gratitude are more tend to feel thankful for the presence of those people who contributed pleasant moments in their life (McCullough et al., 2002) and gratitude serve to building up resilience in people and help them to cope better in stressful situations so grateful people tend to use approach coping (Wood et al.,2007) rather than avoidance coping (Lin, 2016; Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002; Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003). But Lau and Cheng (2017) found contradictory result from present study as gratitude was associated with avoidance coping. Study finding partially supports the fourth hypothesis of significant correlation between gratitude and approach and avoidance coping in doctors. Gratitude not showing any significant correlation with approach coping in doctors.

After ascertaining the relationships between the variables study tried to find out the significant predictor of approach and avoidance coping strategies of doctors. Regression analysis revealed that neuroticism is a significant predictor of approach coping in doctors. Doctors scored high at neuroticism tend to avoid the threatening situation rather than confronting and having more negative emotions in stressful events, so the relationship is found negative between neuroticism and approach coping. The adaptive trait conscientiousness was found significant positive predictor of gratitude in doctors as it is related to taking responsibilities (Tanksale, 2015) and psychological adjustment in life and main component of achieving happiness (Roberts et.al; 2014). Conscientious people are good decision maker and having less conflicts with others which lead them toward more grateful for their life. Here the result of present study partially supports the fifth hypothesis that, personality traits neuroticism, extroversion, openness, Agreeableness, conscientiousness and gratitude would be significant predictor of approach coping in doctors. Extraversion, openness, agreeableness and gratitude not found significant predictor of approach coping in doctors. However, gratitude is found negative significant predictor of avoidance coping in doctors. As we know gratitude is also a character strength and researchers have found that people who perceive the situation in the perspective of gratitude experience more positive emotions, lower levels of stress, and healthier relationships (Watkins, Uher, & Pichinevskiy, 2014; Wood, Joseph, & Maltby, 2009). Practicing gratitude have positive impact on resilience level (Wilson, 2016), which promote approach coping in people (Wood et.al, 2007). The finding of present study partially supported the sixth hypothesis that, when gratitude finds to be significant predictor of avoidance coping in doctors.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Neuroticism (personality trait) promotes adoption of avoidance coping and demotes approach coping in doctors whereas openness and conscientiousness demotes avoidance coping and promote approach coping in doctors. Neuroticism is negatively correlated to gratitude but openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness are positively correlated with gratitude of doctors. Doctors scored high on neuroticism experience more feelings of depressed mood, anger, anxiety and guilt which become hurdle to have feeling of gratitude and adoption of approach coping. The research can be more meaningful if the other professions are also compared with medical profession. Because it will provide a better understanding of the underlying factors responsible for psychological pressure inherent in medical profession. Sample size should be increased for further research in this area. This study only tells about doctors, nurses and pharmacists could be also taken to see the rank differences in showing trait, gratitude and coping.

Declaration of interest statement: There is no conflict of interest in this research.

Availability of data and material:

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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