



## Personality development and health perceptions: A review approach

<sup>1</sup>Kadadanapu Vijay Kumar and <sup>2</sup>Dr. Yugal Kishore

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Maharaja Agrasen Himalayan Garhwal University, Uttarakhand, India

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of Psychology, Maharaja Agrasen Himalayan Garhwal University, Uttarakhand, India

Corresponding Author: Kadadanapu Vijay Kumar

### Abstract

This literature review synthesises research on the relationship between personality development and health perceptions, focusing on how specific personality traits influence individuals' health-related views and behaviours. Through an examination of empirical and theoretical literature, the review highlights the significant roles of neuroticism, conscientiousness, and extraversion in shaping health perceptions. Key findings reveal strong links between these traits and health outcomes, with neuroticism associated with poorer health perceptions and conscientiousness linked to healthier behaviours and perceptions. The paper identifies gaps in current research, particularly in understanding the underlying mechanisms and the effectiveness of tailored interventions. The review concludes with recommendations for future research, emphasising the need for longitudinal and culturally diverse studies to advance the field.

**Keywords:** Personality development, health perceptions, health psychology, neuroticism, conscientiousness, extraversion, cross-cultural studies, health interventions

### Introduction

Personality traits, which constitute enduring patterns of thoughts, emotions, and behaviours, significantly influence various life outcomes, including health perceptions and health-related behaviours. The importance of personality development in shaping these perceptions is a critical area of study within health psychology and educational settings. This literature review aims to synthesise existing research on the nexus between personality development and health perceptions, providing a comprehensive understanding of how personality traits influence individuals' perceptions of their health.

### Significance of personality traits in health psychology

Personality traits are fundamental to psychological theories because they offer insights into individual differences in health behaviour and perceptions. Research consistently demonstrates that certain personality traits can predict health outcomes and perceptions, influencing how individuals approach their health management (Friedman & Booth-Kewley, 1987) [6]. For example, traits such as neuroticism and conscientiousness are strongly correlated with health behaviours and outcomes, affecting everything from stress responses to longevity (Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi, & Goldberg, 2007) [11].

### Theoretical frameworks

Several theoretical frameworks underpin the study of

personality and health. The Biopsychosocial Model, for instance, integrates biological, psychological, and social factors to explain health (Engel, 1977) [5]. Within this model, personality traits represent psychological components that interact with biological predispositions and social environments to shape health outcomes. Another significant framework, the Five Factor Model, categorises personality into five broad dimensions: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Costa & McCrae, 1992) [3, 4]. Each dimension has been studied in relation to health perceptions, with neuroticism and conscientiousness showing particularly strong correlations with negative and positive health outcomes, respectively.

### Personality development over the lifespan

Personality traits are not static; they develop and change throughout an individual's lifespan. Research indicates that personality matures with age, typically stabilising into the 30s and 40s (Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006) [12]. During young adulthood, which encompasses the college years, significant developments in personality traits occur. These changes can have profound implications for students' health perceptions and behaviours during a critical period of their educational and social development.

### Role of personality in health perceptions

The way individuals perceive their health directly influences their health behaviours and subsequent health outcomes.

Personality traits impact health perceptions both directly and indirectly. For example, individuals high in neuroticism may perceive their health more negatively due to their propensity to experience negative emotions and stress, which can exacerbate perceptions of poor health (Lahey, 2009) <sup>[9]</sup>. Conversely, those high in conscientiousness are likely to engage in health-promoting behaviours, leading to more positive health perceptions and better actual health outcomes (Bogg & Roberts, 2004) <sup>[1, 2]</sup>.

### Relevance in educational settings

Understanding the relationship between personality and health perceptions is particularly relevant in educational settings, where health behaviours can impact academic performance and overall well-being. Students' personality traits can influence how they manage stress, interact with peers, and cope with the academic and social challenges of university life. Thus, educational institutions can benefit from integrating personality assessments into student health services to tailor health promotion and intervention programmes more effectively.

### Research gaps and emerging trends

Despite extensive research, significant gaps remain in understanding how changes in personality traits over time influence health perceptions, particularly in diverse populations and under varying social conditions. Furthermore, emerging trends in psychological research, such as the focus on cross-cultural studies and the integration of technological advancements in tracking health behaviours, suggest new directions for exploring these relationships.

### Objectives

- To examine the relationship between personality traits and health perceptions as outlined in existing literature:** Focus on how traits such as neuroticism, conscientiousness, extraversion, openness, and agreeableness influence individuals' perceptions of their health.
- To identify trends and developments in the study of personality and health perceptions over recent decades:** Assess the progression of research findings and theoretical advancements concerning personality development and its impact on health perceptions.
- To evaluate the gaps and limitations in the current research landscape:** Highlight areas where insufficient research has been conducted, particularly in understanding the mechanisms of how personality affects health perceptions and the effectiveness of personality-based interventions.
- To suggest directions for future research based on identified gaps:** Propose potential studies that could address these gaps, emphasizing longitudinal and cross-cultural research to enhance the understanding of personality development's impact on health perceptions.

### Literature review

#### Foundational Theories in Personality and Health

The study of personality and health perceptions is anchored in several foundational theories. The Biopsychosocial Model (Engel, 1977) <sup>[5]</sup> posits that health outcomes result

from a complex interaction between biological, psychological, and social factors. Personality traits, categorised under psychological factors, are viewed as crucial mediators in this model. Another influential framework, the Five Factor Model (FFM) of personality, identifies five broad dimensions of personality: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism, each of which has implications for health perceptions and behaviours (Costa & McCrae, 1992) <sup>[3, 4]</sup>.

### Personality traits and health outcomes

- Neuroticism is consistently linked with negative health perceptions. Individuals high in neuroticism tend to experience negative emotions more frequently and intensely, which correlates with poorer health perceptions and outcomes (Lahey, 2009) <sup>[9]</sup>. Neuroticism has been associated with a heightened awareness of bodily sensations and a predisposition to interpret these sensations as indicative of illness (Suls & Martin, 2005) <sup>[14]</sup>.
- Conscientiousness has been shown to be a protective factor regarding health perceptions. Higher levels of conscientiousness are associated with positive health behaviours such as regular exercise, healthy eating, and adherence to medical advice, leading to better health outcomes and perceptions (Bogg & Roberts, 2004) <sup>[1, 2]</sup>.
- Extraversion is linked with better health outcomes through mechanisms such as greater social support, which can provide emotional resources and practical help in times of health crises (Smith & Williams, 2016) <sup>[13]</sup>. Extraverts tend to have more robust social networks, which enhance their perceptions of health and well-being.
- Openness to experience and agreeableness have been less studied in relation to health perceptions, but existing research suggests that openness may facilitate better health outcomes through a willingness to try new health-related behaviours and a greater receptivity to health information (Terracciano et al., 2008) <sup>[15]</sup>.

### Empirical research on personality and health perceptions

A multitude of studies have empirically examined the link between personality traits and health perceptions. For instance, research by Friedman and Booth-Kewley (1987) <sup>[6]</sup> found that personality traits are significant predictors of various health outcomes, including chronic diseases and mortality. Recent meta-analyses have further corroborated the strong influence of traits like neuroticism and conscientiousness on both physical and mental health outcomes (Kotov, Gamez, Schmidt, & Watson, 2010) <sup>[8]</sup>.

### Developmental trajectories and health

Research on personality development across the lifespan indicates that personality traits are not static; they can change in response to life experiences and transitions. Longitudinal studies suggest that such developmental changes in personality can influence health perceptions significantly (Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006) <sup>[12]</sup>. For example, as individuals age and their conscientiousness increase, their health perceptions tend to improve due to better health-related decision-making and behaviours.

### Cross-cultural perspectives in personality and health

Cross-cultural research has started to illuminate how cultural contexts influence the expression of personality traits and their impact on health perceptions. Studies suggest that the strength and direction of the relationships between certain personality traits and health outcomes can vary significantly across different cultural settings (McCrae & Terracciano, 2005) <sup>[10]</sup>.

### Conclusion of the review

This literature review has elucidated the complex and multifaceted relationships between personality traits and health perceptions. By drawing on a wide range of empirical and theoretical sources, it provides a nuanced understanding of how individual differences in personality can influence health outcomes and perceptions across different life stages and cultural contexts.

### Materials and Methods

#### Literature review process

The methodology employed in this literature review is structured to provide a comprehensive and systematic examination of the existing body of knowledge on the relationship between personality development and health perceptions. The process is designed to ensure the inclusion of relevant and high-quality studies, following the guidelines recommended by Jesson, Matheson, and Lacey (2011) <sup>[7]</sup> for conducting systematic literature reviews.

#### Criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of sources

##### Inclusion criteria

- 1. Publication date:** Studies published up to and including the year 2019.
- 2. Language:** Articles written in English.
- 3. Study type:** Empirical studies, theoretical papers, and meta-analyses that directly address the impact of personality traits on health perceptions.
- 4. Accessibility:** Articles must be accessible either through academic databases or university subscriptions.

##### Exclusion criteria

- 1. Publication Date:** Studies published after 2019.
- 2. Relevance:** Studies that do not directly address the relationship between personality traits and health perceptions.
- 3. Incomplete Studies:** Conference abstracts, unpublished theses, and incomplete reports.
- 4. Quality:** Studies that lack peer review or have methodological flaws that could significantly bias the results.

#### Methods of analysis

The analysis of the literature involved several key steps to synthesise the findings from the included studies:

- 1. Descriptive Analysis:** Basic information such as authors, year of publication, study design, sample size, and main findings were extracted and tabulated.
- 2. Thematic Synthesis:** Themes related to personality traits and health perceptions were identified and grouped across studies to summarise trends and common findings.
- 3. Critical Evaluation:** The quality and impact of the

studies were assessed, considering study design, sample size, and the robustness of the findings.

- 4. Integration into Existing Theories:** Findings were discussed in the context of existing theoretical frameworks like the Biopsychosocial Model and the Five Factor Model to evaluate how new data align with or challenge these theories.

**Table 1:** Summary of Methodological Components

Component	Description
Study Scope	Personality traits and health perceptions
Inclusion Criteria	Studies up to 2019, in English, relevant empirical and theoretical work
Exclusion Criteria	Post-2019 publications, irrelevant topics, poor quality
Analysis Methods	Descriptive analysis, thematic synthesis, critical evaluation

### Results

The systematic review of the literature on personality development and health perceptions has revealed significant findings and trends, which are summarised below:

#### Key findings and trends

##### Link between specific traits and health perceptions

Neuroticism is consistently associated with poorer health perceptions, as individuals high in this trait tend to have heightened awareness of bodily symptoms and a predisposition towards negative thinking about health (Lahey, 2009) <sup>[9]</sup>. Thematic synthesis revealed that individuals with high levels of conscientiousness tend to have more positive health perceptions due to their proactive health behaviours and adherence to medical recommendations. Critical evaluation of the studies highlighted the need for further research to explore the underlying mechanisms of how personality traits influence health perceptions.

Conscientiousness correlates strongly with positive health behaviours and perceptions, suggesting that higher conscientiousness leads to better health management and outcomes (Bogg & Roberts, 2004) <sup>[1, 2]</sup>. This indicates that interventions targeting conscientiousness may be beneficial in improving health outcomes. Future studies could also investigate how other personality traits interact with conscientiousness to influence health perceptions.

Extraversion is linked with better health outcomes through greater social support, which can mitigate the impact of stress and enhance overall health perceptions (Smith & Williams, 2016) <sup>[13]</sup>. For example, individuals high in extraversion may be more likely to seek out social connections that provide emotional support during times of stress. Understanding how different personality traits work together to influence health perceptions can help tailor interventions for improved outcomes.

##### Developmental changes in traits

Personality traits undergo significant changes during young adulthood, a critical period for establishing health-related habits. Increases in conscientiousness and decreases in neuroticism during this phase are particularly beneficial for health perceptions (Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006) <sup>[12]</sup>. These changes in personality traits can lead to a greater

sense of control over one's health behaviours and outcomes. By recognising and supporting these shifts during young adulthood, interventions can be more effectively targeted towards improving overall health perceptions and behaviours.

### Cultural variations

Cross-cultural studies indicate variations in how personality traits influence health perceptions. Cultural factors can modulate the expression of traits and their impact on health behaviours and perceptions (McCrae & Terracciano, 2005)<sup>[10]</sup>. Interventions that take cultural differences into account in the relationship between personality traits and health perceptions can be more successful in promoting positive health behaviours. Understanding how cultural factors influence the connection between personality traits and health outcomes is essential for developing tailored interventions that are effective across diverse populations.

### Gaps in the literature

- **Longitudinal Research:** There is a need for more longitudinal studies that track changes in personality traits and their long-term impact on health perceptions across different life stages.
- **Mechanisms of Influence:** The mechanisms by which personality traits influence health perceptions are not fully understood, particularly for traits other than neuroticism and conscientiousness.
- **Interventions Based on Personality:** Few studies have explored the effectiveness of health interventions tailored to different personality profiles, particularly in diverse cultural settings.

**Table 2:** Summary of Literature Findings

Personality Trait	Impact on Health Perceptions	Key Reference
Neuroticism	Negative	Lahey (2009) <sup>[9]</sup>
Conscientiousness	Positive	Bogg & Roberts (2004) <sup>[1, 2]</sup>
Extraversion	Positive through social support	Smith & Williams (2016) <sup>[13]</sup>

### Discussion

The results of this comprehensive literature review underscore the significant impact of personality traits on health perceptions. The findings align with existing theories, particularly the Biopsychosocial Model, which considers personality traits as part of the psychological domain influencing health (Engel, 1977)<sup>[5]</sup>. The Five Factor Model also provides a useful framework for understanding the relationship between personality and health outcomes (Costa & McCrae, 1992)<sup>[3, 4]</sup>. Furthermore, the research suggests that individuals with higher levels of extraversion tend to have more positive health perceptions, possibly due to the social support they receive from their relationships. This highlights the importance of considering personality factors when assessing overall well-being and health outcomes. Moving forward, it will be crucial for healthcare professionals to take the role of personality in shaping individuals' health perceptions and behaviours in order to provide more personalised and effective care.

### Theoretical implications

- **Integration of Models:** The evidence supports a more integrated approach where personality theories are combined with health psychology models to better predict and understand health behaviours and perceptions.
- The changes in personality traits over time, especially during young adulthood, highlight the need for a developmental perspective in health psychology that considers the evolving nature of personality.

### Practical implications

- **Tailored Interventions:** There is potential for developing health interventions tailored to personality traits. For instance, interventions for individuals high in neuroticism might focus on stress management and cognitive reframing techniques.
- **Educational Settings:** Educational institutions can benefit from integrating personality assessments into their student health services to better tailor health promotion programmes.

### Future research directions

- **Longitudinal Studies:** Future studies should explore the longitudinal impact of personality changes on health perceptions to better understand the causality and directionality of these relationships.
- **Intervention Studies:** Research should also focus on the effectiveness of personality-tailored health interventions across different populations and cultural settings.

### Conclusion

This comprehensive literature review has elucidated the significant role of personality traits in influencing health perceptions. The findings indicate that traits such as neuroticism and conscientiousness have robust associations with health perceptions, impacting individuals' behaviours and psychological well-being. However, gaps in the literature, particularly regarding the mechanisms through which personality traits influence health and the effectiveness of interventions tailored to personality profiles, suggest the need for further research. Addressing these gaps could enhance the development of targeted interventions and educational programmes, ultimately improving health outcomes across diverse populations. Future research should also explore these dynamics in longitudinal and cross-cultural studies to fully capture the complexity of personality development's impact on health perceptions.

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