

PERSONALITY TRAITS AND TENDENCY TOWARDS PSYCHOSOMATICS¹

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Abstract

Psychosomatic diseases are physical diseases but psychological factors play an important role in their origin. Notable examples of psychosomatic diseases are skin diseases, diseases of the gastrointestinal tract, diseases of the respiratory organs and blood vessels, as well as diseases of glands with internal secretion and rheumatic diseases. The question is which personality traits are associated with a tendency towards psychosomatics. So, this research aimed to examine whether personality traits (activity, aggressiveness, sensations, neuroticism, sociability) can be used to predict a tendency towards psychosomatics. The sample was convenient and consisted of 291 respondents ($M = 27.5\%$, $F = 72.5\%$). The average age of the respondents was 19.19 years ($SD = 1.37$). The instruments included the ZKPQ questionnaire designed to measure basic personality traits and the HI psychosomatic tendency test. Aggressiveness, sociability, and neuroticism are statistically significantly related to psychosomatic tendencies ($p < .05$). Aggressiveness and neuroticism are positively related to psychosomatic tendencies, while sociability is negatively related. The model composed of personality traits explains 36% of the criterion variance ($R^2 = .36$, $F_{5,164} = 18.24$, $p < .01$). Neuroticism ($\beta = .42$, $t = 6.17$, $p < .01$) and sociability ($\beta = -.32$, $t = -4.35$, $p < .01$) stood out as significant predictors of psychosomatic tendencies. Higher aggressiveness and neuroticism, as well as less pronounced sociability, are associated with a greater tendency towards psychosomatics. Recognizing personal factors associated with psychosomatic tendencies at a younger age represents an important contribution to creating preventive programs that can focus on teaching students how to deal with their own emotions and express them in a socially desirable way.

Keywords: *Personality traits, tendency to psychosomaticism, adolescents.*

1. Introduction

“The term “psychosomatic” carries two connotations having an ancient tradition in Western thinking and medicine: psychogenesis of disease and holism” (Ando, 2020, p. 1804). Psychosomatic diseases are physical diseases in the origin of which psychological factors play an important role (Hadži Pešić, 2009). Psychosomatic diseases can be, among others, skin diseases, diseases of the gastrointestinal tract, diseases of the respiratory organs and blood vessels, as well as diseases of glands with internal secretion and rheumatic diseases. Personality is an important factor related to health, as individuals’ self-diagnosis and their coping mechanisms are very much dependent on their personality traits (Friedman, 2000). A recently conducted study (Ghazanfari et al., 2020) showed that there is a significant association between the dimensions of personality (neuroticism, extroversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness) and dimensions of psychosomatic complaints profiles (gastrointestinal, neuro-skeletal, pharyngeal-respiratory, and psychological). Further, results of study conducted in Serbia on a student sample (Panić, Radojković, & Hadži-Pešić, 2013), showed that students prone to psychosomatic tendencies have higher scores on neuroticism and aggressiveness compared to those who do not show such a tendency. Although the clinical picture of chronic psychosomatic disorders is most explicitly manifested in middle-aged and older people, their symptoms can occur earlier in childhood and or at a young age (Larionow, Ageenkova & Dedenok, 2022). For example, Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, and McGorry (2007) showed that the onset of most psychosomatic complaints starts during the age range of 12 to 24 years.

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2. Objectives

The aim of this research was to examine whether personality traits (activity, aggressiveness, sensations, neuroticism, sociability) can be used to predict a tendency towards psychosomatics.

3. Methods

3.1. Sample

The sample was convenient and consisted of 291 respondents ($n_{male} = 80$ (27.5%), $n_{female} = 211$ (72.5%)), aged 18 to 24 years ($M = 19.19$; $SD = 1.37$). The respondents were high school students and first and second-year students of the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš, Serbia.

3.2. Variables and instruments

Psychosomatic was measured using - HI from the battery Cybernetic batteries of conative tests (KON 6; Momirović, Wolf, & Džamonja, 1998). *HI* is a regulator of organic functions, the disorders of which cause functional disorders of basic organic systems. It contains 30 Likert-type items where respondents express their degree of agreement with each of the given statements (1 – not true, 5 - completely true). Reliability in our study was $\alpha = .88$.

Personality traits were measured using Zuckerman-Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire - 50 – CC (ZKPQ-50-CC; Aluja et al., 2006) contains 50 true/false statements. The dimensions of this questionnaire are: activity ($\alpha = .70$); aggressiveness ($\alpha = .62$); impulsive sensation seeking ($\alpha = .62$); neuroticism ($\alpha = .74$); sociability ($\alpha = .74$).

4. Results

Descriptive statistics and correlation analyses are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlation of the of measured variables.

Variable	Act.	Aggress.	Sensat.	Neuro.	Sociab.	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Sk</i>	<i>Ku</i>
Psychosomatics	-.01	.15*	.06	.49**	-.36**	259	59.72	18.2	0.637	0.022
Activity		-.02	.22**	.07	.04	268	3.99	2.21	0.131	-0.745
Aggressiveness			.33**	.03	.12	263	4.41	2.32	0.176	-0.633
Sensations				-.01	.39**	249	5.10	2.30	0.094	-0.576
Neuroticism					-.28**	259	5.07	2.48	-0.029	-0.938
Sociability						268	4.38	2.53	0.145	-0.886

Note. **Correlation is significant at the .01 level; *Correlation is significant at the .05 level.

The results showed that psychosomatic is in positive correlation with aggressiveness and neuroticism, and in negative correlation with sociability (Table 1). The regression model composed of personality traits explains 36% of the criterion variance ($R^2 = .36$, $F_{5,164} = 18.24$, $p < .01$). Neuroticism ($\beta = .42$, $t = 6.17$, $p < .01$) and sociability ($\beta = -.32$, $t = -4.35$, $p < .01$) stood out as significant predictors of psychosomatic tendencies.

5. Discussion

According to the obtained results, we can say that higher aggressiveness and neuroticism, as well as less pronounced sociability, are associated with a greater tendency towards psychosomatics. Further, regression analysis showed that neuroticism and sociability stood out as significant predictors of psychosomatic tendencies. Similar findings were obtained in previous research (Ghazanfari et al., 2020; Panić et al., 2013), indicating that a high score on neuroticism can negatively affect the physical and psychological health of the individual and play as a precursor to a variety of psychosomatic complaints profiles (Ghazanfari et al., 2020). More precisely, the obtained results showed that a more pronounced tendency towards anxiety, tension, concern, indecisiveness, and sensitivity to criticism (Zuckerman, 2002, as cited in Panić et al., 2013), represents an important factor associated with a tendency toward psychosomatics in students aged 18 to 26. It is an interesting finding that sociability stood out as a significant predictor of tendency towards psychosomatic. Sociability refers to preferring big parties, interacting with many people, having many friends and desire to spend more time with them, preference for being with others as opposed to being alone and pursuing solitary activities, and intolerance for social

isolation (Huang et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2002). Having in mind that sociability was perceived as a major facet of extraversion (Aluja et al., 2010) we could say that our finding is in line with the previous one (Ghazanfari et al., 2020). In the study of Ghazanfari et al. (2020) extraversion was negatively associated with all somatic complaints' profiles. Extroversion is closely related to activity and hence can lead to acceptance, and group-oriented behavior. It is correlated with positive emotions and skill in creating successful situations, with expression and confidence in social situations, and all that can positively influence the individual's well-being. Further, results of the correlation analysis showed that aggressiveness is correlated with the psychosomatic tendencies. This personality dimension refers to verbal aggressiveness, rudeness, inconsiderate behavior, and impatience (Zuckerman, 2002, as cited in Panić et al., 2013). Relying on the previous knowledge about the psychological structure of psychosomatics, the result draws attention to the fact that respondents prone to psychosomatics are unable to express and describe their emotional experience, process conflicts through the process of imagination, fantasy, and creative creativity, which leads to frustration, and the emotional charge is externalized and aggressive manifestation is initiated (Panić et al., 2013).

6. Conclusion

Recognizing personal factors associated with psychosomatic tendencies at a younger age represents an important contribution to creating preventive programs. Finding that higher aggressiveness and neuroticism, as well as less pronounced sociability, are associated with a greater tendency toward psychosomatics indicating the need for creating a program that will focus on teaching students how to deal with their own emotions and express them in a socially desirable way.

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