



Relationship between Neuroticism and Social Adjustment of Undergraduate Students in One Selected University in Kenya

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author JOK designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author JOK managed the analyses of the study and the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between neuroticism and social adjustment of undergraduate university students. The study was informed by the Big five personality theory. Concurrent triangulation design was adopted within the mixed method approach. The target population comprised 4805 undergraduate students. The sample comprised 756 students, 1 student counsellor, 1 Caterer and accommodation staff and 1 career guidance making a total sample size of 759. An adapted instrument titled "integrated Questionnaire, Students' social Adjustment" (IQSA) were used to collect quantitative data from students while Interview schedule was used to obtain qualitative data from student counsellor, caterer and accommodation and career counsellor. The internal validity of the constructs was investigated by subjecting the survey data to suitability tests using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO Index) and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. Reliability of questionnaires was ensured using internal consistency method and Cronbach's alpha value was 0.684. There is statistically significant ($n=54$; $r= -.206$; $p<.05$), though negative, relationship between neuroticism personality traits and social adjustment among undergraduate students, with high level of neuroticism personality traits associated to lower social adjustment among the undergraduate students. It was recommended that the university students' counsellors to assess and identify those students at risk and change their perception on changes experience at the university.

Keywords: Relationship; neuroticism; social adjustment; undergraduate students; university; Kenya.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social adjustment to a college environment is one facet of student adjustment and serves as one of the most critical activities emerging adults undertake that predicts success in college and beyond [1]. Because of the strong relationships between social adjustment, successful transition to college, and persistence, researchers have explored predictors of social adjustment in order to enhance the students' experience by way of implementing support systems where needed [2]. Social adjustment reflects the degree to which students have integrated themselves into the social structures of university residencies and the broader university among other kinds of social integration [3]. The advantages sustained by on-campus residency are likely to enhance the social support resources to which students have access, as captured by the concept of bonding social capital. Therefore, we expect those who live on campus will report higher perceptions of bonding social capital within their college network than those living off campus. Life at the University for the First Year students can be exciting and challenging at the same time [4]. In addition, parental control ceases and the student is confronted with new found freedom [5]. The increased personal freedom can be wonderful and frightening at the same time. In one recent study, first-year students' participation in peer-led support groups led to reduced loneliness and higher perceptions of social support with regard to the college transition [6].

A study by Mudhovozi [7] in Zimbabwe showed that students experienced varied social and academic adjustment problems. The students over-relied on social networks and efficacious beliefs to cope with the challenges. The students need to be exposed to various coping resources to enable them to quickly and smoothly adjust into the new life at university. In Kampala 2008 National Baseline survey on Alcohol and substance abuse in learning Institutions (2009) illustrates an increased use as education level advances. An elaborate study by Wang'eri et al. [8] indicated that majority of students at Kenyatta university found the transition challenges in all the following areas, in relation to autonomy 13.33% had high autonomy while 86.67% has average autonomy. With regard to social compatibility only 6.6% showed high compatibility and 73.33% average while 20% showed low compatibility respectively. Data on compatibility with roommates revealed that only 6.6% were

compatible, 40% average and 53.33% low compatibility. On access to support services 20% had high access, 66.70% average while 13.33% showed low access to support services. Kenya has reported high rates of substance use among students in public Universities. NACADA (2010) reports further reveals that the most widely used substance by students in Kenya is alcohol, which is divided into six (6) types depending on the content of each. Spirit 36%, Local brew (Chang'aa) 30%, Busaa 15%, others 13% and beer 6%. Atwoli, Mungla, Ndung'u, Kinoti, and Ogot [9] also revealed significant physical and psychosocial problems among students' population. The prevalence of substance use was high at a rate of 69.8%, alcohol use was 51.9%, cigarette use was 42.8%, cannabis was 2% and cocaine was 0.6% leading to high risks of subsequent substance dependence and other deleterious consequences like frequent quarrelling and fights, loss and damage to property, problems with parents, medical problems and unplanned unprotected sex with all its dire consequences.

According study by Goldner [10] neuroticism was negatively associated with the quality of the relationship and their conduct of self-concept. Christensen [11] found that persons who are low in emotional stability (Neuroticism) have been shown to demonstrate poor social and emotional development, higher rates of anxiety and depression in college, and steeper attrition rates. Owuh, Ijeoma and Huldah [12] revealed that significant relationship exists between neurotic students and the relationship with school activities. Trógolo and Medrano [13] reported that neuroticism was negatively and significantly related to academic satisfaction. Imran Ali (2017) found out that neuroticism is found to be negatively related to individual innovativeness and satisfaction with life perceptions. Kase, Ueno and Oishi [14] reported that neuroticism being negatively correlated with comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness. In USA, Joyner and Loprinzi [15] revealed that Personality traits neuroticism and openness to experience were associated with higher levels of anxiety. Perera et al. [16] reported that neuroticism was indirectly associated with academic adjustment via the coping strategies, and the personality factors were also indirectly associated with achievement. Another study by Erfani [17] found out that neuroticism was the only psychological trait, negatively correlated with both language proficiency and academic success of Iranian foreign students. In Croatia,

Sanja, Ivanka and Ines [18] found that neuroticism has a significant individual contribution to depression in both groups. Dubey et al. [19] conducted a study on the personality traits of substance abusers as compared with non-substance abusers by using the NEO-Five Factor Inventory. Study revealed that substance abused group scored higher on Neuroticism.

Weston & Jackson [20] also found that, high levels of neuroticism predicted less smoking. Onyecho, et al. [21] evaluated the patterns of use of psychoactive substances and to assess the predominant personality traits among the in-patients. High scores on the three dimensions of personality trait of Neuroticism were significant associations to psychoactive substance abuse. Adams [22] studied the Effects of Personality Traits on Predicting Substance Dependence in University Students. This study used logistic regression analysis to determine the extent to which individual undergraduate students' scores for personality traits as measured in scales for neuroticism may predict probability of having a substance dependence disorder. In Manila, Datu [23] it was reported that neuroticism significant correlated to college freshmen's overall adjustment in college. Neuroticism was also found to be predictive determinants of adaptability to college life. Yousof and Al-Zoubi (2014) indicated that neuroticism managed to predict 16% of explained variance in emotional adjustment and 9% in goal commitment. Devi and Prakash [24] investigated the relationship between personality traits and suicidal ideation among college students. The study also revealed that high neuroticism had positive relation with suicidal ideation. Farva Bhutto & Kaneez Fatima Mamdani [25] reported that no statistically significant relationship was found between plagiarism and neuroticism. Kotov et al. [26] found that neuroticism was most strongly correlated with all disorders, although other personality traits also showed significant effects. In Nigeria by Ayodele [27] found that neuroticism was potent personality factors to the prediction of interpersonal relationship. In Kenya, Ganu and Kogutu, [28] observed that neuroticism had a positive relation with organizational commitment and Neuroticism also had a positive relation with job satisfaction. Aomo et al. [29] studied the relationship between personality subtypes and indulgence in behaviour problems among Kenyan students. The study revealed students who exhibited neurotic was less involved in behavior problem personality.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

Concurrent Triangulation design was adopted. Triangulation refers to a combination of methodologies in a study of the same phenomenon [30]. The reason for using this design is because it is an efficient design, in which both types of data are collected during one phase of the research at roughly the same time and also each type of data can be collected and analysed separately and independently, using the techniques traditionally associated with each data type. The design was found to be appropriate for this study because the researcher directly merged, compared and contrasted quantitative statistical result with quantitative findings or validated or expanded quantitative results with qualitative data.

2.2 Study Participants

The target population of this study was four thousand eight hundred and five (4805) undergraduate students enrolled in ten schools at one University in western Kenya and Five officers from key university offices dealing with student's services and welfare. The sample size for students was 756, 3 counsellors and 3 Dean of students, making total sample of 759.

2.3 Research Instruments

The Big Five Personality and Inventory Integrated Students Questionnaire were used to collect quantitative data from students. Interview schedule for Dean of students and counsellor were used to obtain qualitative data. The internal validity of the constructs was investigated by subjecting the survey data to suitability tests using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO Index) and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. Bartlett's test for Sphericity are all significant ($p < 0.001$, $p = 0.000$) and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin indexes are all $> .6$ for all the subscales of the questionnaire. The subscales met the required level of internal consistency of reliability of 0.684 for the neuroticism questionnaire.

2.4 Data Collection Procedures

The permission to conduct the study was obtained from the office of university academics. Thereafter, the students signed consent forms then participated in the study. This ensured

voluntary participation by the university students after signing the consent forms. The students took an average of 30-45 minutes to fill in the questionnaires.

2.5 Data Analysis

The data collected was analyzed using simple percentage and Pearson correlation coefficient statistical methods, descriptive statistical techniques. Pearson correlation evaluates the linear relationship between two continuous variables. Qualitative data from the interview schedule were organized thematically.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Gender Distribution of the Students

The study sought to investigate the gender distribution of the students. Fig. 1 shows the summary of the gender distribution among the student respondents.

From Fig. 1, it is evident that a majority of the respondents were males, with female students being only 272 (44.0%) of the student respondents. This could imply that there is gender disparity in terms of university student enrolments in Kenyan Universities. This finding is in line with the report by Higher Education Statistical Reports (2016) which had indicated that gender parity had not been fully achieved in university colleges in Kenya. In addition, the finding is close to the recent survey conducted by UNICEF (2018) which established that in Kenyan universities, majority of the students enrolled are males.

3.2 Rating of Neuroticism Personality Traits among Undergraduate Students

The study investigated the relationship between neuroticism personality traits and social adjustment of undergraduate students. First, the study explored the level of neuroticism among the respondents, and then investigated the relationship between the level of neuroticism and students' social adjustment. Eight itemed, five points, Likert scaled questionnaire was used to explore the level of neuroticism personality trait among the respondents. The respondents rated the way they see themselves using strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1), with higher ratings interpreted to mean high neuroticism

personality trait and vice versa. The outcomes on neuroticism personality trait levels among the undergraduate students were summarized in mean and standard deviation as shown in Table 1.

Using the Big Five Personality Test, the study established that in general many of the undergraduate students are fairly neurotic (mean=3.03; SD=0.53), but they vary in their of neuroticism personality levels. This was reflected by the fact that although most of the students are emotional and frequently exhibit high emotional reactions to stress, some of them are emotionally stable and less reactive to stress. For instance, using the scale of 1 to 5, at a mean of 3.08 (SD=1.30) many of the students accepted that they always become stressed out easily even with very little provocation. Equally, fairly large number of the students accepted that they often (mean=3.16; SD=1.38) become overwhelmed by emotions. It also emerged that some of the students do things that they later regret. This was interpreted by the response of more than three out of five (mean=3.13; SD=1.47) of the students who accepted that they always regret certain things they get involved in or do. Likewise, another group of the sampled students indicated that they often feel blue (mean=2.68; SD=1.44) and are always afraid that they will do the wrong things (mean=3.17; SD=1.36).

On the contrary, another proportion of the students exhibited low neurotic personality trait. For instance, some of them were established not to be easily bothered by things (mean=2.81; SD=1.33), they remained calm, even in tense situations (mean=2.76; SD=1.37) and always keep their cool (mean=3.40; SD=1.36). They never perceive situations as threatening and they rarely feel moody, anxious and often emotionally stable and less reactive to stress.

H₀1: There is no statistically significant relationship between neuroticism and social adjustment of undergraduate students

To establish whether there was any statistical significant relationship between neuroticism and social adjustment, the null hypothesis was tested using Pearson Moment Coefficient and regression analysis. The level of neuroticism personality trait were computed from frequency of responses and converted into continuous scale. Equally, students' level of social adjustment was computed from their responses

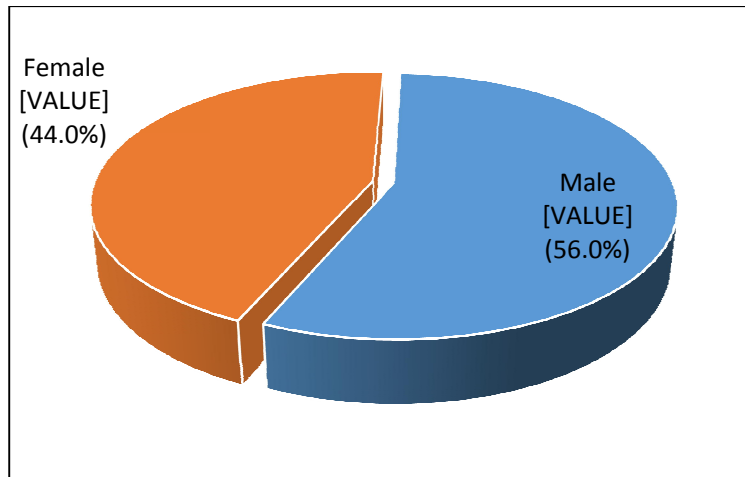


Fig. 1. Gender distribution of the students

Source: Survey data (2019)

Table 1. Rating of neuroticism personality traits

Item	Mean	Standard deviation
1. Often feels blue	2.68	1.44
2. Is not easily bothered by things.	2.81	1.33
3. Becomes stressed out easily.	3.08	1.30
4. Becomes overwhelmed by emotions.	3.16	1.38
5. Is calm, even in tense situations.	2.76	1.37
6. Is afraid that I will do the wrong thing.	3.17	1.36
7. Keeps my cool.	3.40	1.36
8. Does things I later regret	3.13	1.47
Mean average neuroticism level	3.03	0.53

Source: Survey data (2019)

Table 2. Correlation: Relationship between neuroticism and social adjustment

		Student's Social Adjustment
Neuroticism	Pearson Correlation	-.206**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	54

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

on social adjustment questionnaire. All the negatively worded statements were reversed, such that high scale ratings implied high perceived level of neuroticism personality trait and high social adjustment and vice-versa. The significant level was set at .05, such that if the p-value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected and conclusion reached that there is statistically significant relationship between neuroticism and social adjustment of undergraduate students. If the p-value was larger than 0.05, it would be concluded that a significant difference does not exist between the variables. Table 2 shows the correlation analysis results in SPSS output.

It is evident from Table 2 that the p-value = 0.000 is less than the sig. level of 0.05. Therefore, there was sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis that, “there was no statistically significant correlation between neuroticism personality traits and student’s social adjustment.” Hence, it was concluded that there is statistically significant (n=54; r= -.206; p<.05), though negative, relationship between neuroticism personality traits and social adjustment among undergraduate students, with high level of neuroticism personality traits associated to lower social adjustment among the undergraduate students and vice-versa. Neuroticism refers to an individual’s propensity to

experience negative affect. More specifically, individuals scoring high on this trait are upset easily, irritable, impulsive, and more prone to negative feelings like anxiety and depression. On the other hand, neuroticism increases people's tendencies towards having more stressful events and increases people's talent for having negative events. Therefore, the people will become more vulnerable against people's daily activities. Other characteristics including a tendency to experience anxiety, tension, hostility, low top, irrational thoughts, depression and low self-esteem can also be a part of one's abilities to have a negative impact on social relationships and emotions.

"Poor relationship with others due to underlined issues from the external"
(Student counsellor)

Students with negative emotions are also often distracted and lack concentration. For instance, prior longitudinal studies have found that (a) neuroticism is related to increased insecurity towards friends.

"They tend to take offences, personalise issues. They are more vocal. Talk less"
(caterer)

One of the most consistent findings of this individual-level research is that neuroticism and associated traits are detrimental for an individual's perception of the relationship. That is, neuroticism has been consistently found to be associated with lower relationship quality and a higher risk of separation [31]. Shifting the attention away from intrapersonal effects, studies with dyadic designs have also found interpersonal effects, which indicate to what extent an individual's personality influences the relationship quality of his or her partner. Again, neuroticism turned out to be the most influential trait in this regard [32]. Negative aspects of adolescent peer relationships give neuroticism's link to biological tendencies to experience social situations as threatening and distressful. Past research has found that children who are withdrawn, depressed, and anxious (i.e., neurotic) are unable to deal with these negative emotions constructively and as a result increase their risk of being victimized (Perry et al., 2001).

"Have problem of relationship because fear of problems. Fixed in their past history than performance. See others as part of their relationship problem. They threatened

others, Engage in Dating violence" (student counselor)

Neuroticism appears to interfere with relationship satisfaction in multiple ways. By definition, neurotic individuals tend to be highly reactive to stress and prone to experiencing negative emotions. These tendencies are likely to radiate onto the partner and create problems over time. Neurotic individuals are characterized by their negative emotions. They feel depressed, anxious and doubtful. Their mood changes constantly and they carry out their impulses without rationality [33] students who are depressed and do not have hope for better future are also likely to choose unethical ways, while there is no relationship between anxiety and unethical academic behaviour.

Previous reviews outlined that individuals high (versus low) on neuroticism tend to select themselves into rather unstable and unsatisfying relationships that are full of conflict and even abuse (Jeronimus, 2015). Neuroticism also predicts the annual prevalence of infidelity after controlling for sex, age, education, and race, and even after controlling for marital dissatisfaction. Consequently, neuroticism is more predictive of relationship dissolution than socioeconomic status or intelligence (Buss, 2003; Roberts et al., 2007). Neuroticism thus captures individual differences in how individuals perceive, construe, and feel about social reality, which influence how they respond to it, and in dynamic interaction with conscientiousness and other personality phenomena, can have a substantial role in mental and somatic health (Jeronimus, Kotov, Riese, & Ormel, 2016). Fetterman and Robinson [34] found that there was a positive and significant correlation between neuroticism and passivity. The individuals high on this attribute tend to think submissively in the formation and maintenance competency. The findings were in line with the previous studies [35] which concluded that individuals low in emotional stability (i.e., high in neuroticism) often express anger, moodiness and insecurity in their friendships resultantly, may cause IDs. Moreover, neuroticism was found to be the significant positive predictor of IDs in university students also supported by previous studies.

Neuroticism describes a tendency to have unsettling thoughts and feelings. A high score in neuroticism can mean that one, often feel vulnerable or insecure, get stressed easily. Struggle with difficult situation and have mood

swings. Those scoring high on neuroticism, may blame themselves when things go wrong. They also get frustrated with themselves easily, especially if they make a mistake. They are also prone to worrying. This affects their social adjustment.

“Do not socialise very quickly. Easily swayed by peers into drugs, alcohol (caterer) Easily swayed by peers into drugs, alcohol” (career counsellor)

From the responses from the counsellor, caterer and career above it is revealed that students with high score on neuroticism traits have poor social adjustment in college.

“Do not socialise very quickly. Have problem of relationship because fear of problems. Fixed in their past history than performance” (career counsellor)

Robinson (2012) found that there was a positive and significant correlation between neuroticism and passivity. The individuals high on this attribute tend to think submissively in the formation and maintenance of interpersonal bonding, diverse interpersonal relationships. It is found that neuroticism is positively correlated with interpersonal problems as the individual's low in emotional stability often express anger, moodiness and insecurity in their friendships.

Career officer response also revealed that students with high in neurotic personality take long time to socially adjust in college. Those scoring low on neuroticism: keep calm in

stressful situations, are more optimistic, worry less and have a more stable mood. A low neuroticism score can mean one is confident and have more resilience and find it easy to keep calm under stress. Relaxation might also come more easily to them. Therefore, those students low in neuroticism experience positive social adjustment.

However, a coefficient of determination was computed using simple linear regression analysis to estimate the level of influence of neuroticism personality traits on student's social adjustment and the result was as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 revealed that neuroticism personality traits accounted for 4.1% (Adjusted R² =.041) of the variation in students' social adjustment. This finding implies that variation in the level of neuroticism personality traits explains about 4% of the variability in student's social adjustment among under graduate students. Although it is significant, it is a fairly small influence of predictor on the dependent variable. However, Table 4 shows the coefficients values of the regression model on influence of neuroticism personality traits on students' social adjustment.

From Table 4 it evident that there is a 95% confidence that the slope of the true regression line is between -.246 and -.111. This suggests that there is a 95% confidence that for every one unit decrease in neuroticism personality trait, there is an ensuing rise in students' social adjustment rating of .179 units which is between -.246 and -.111 units.

Table 3. Model summary on regression analysis of influence of conscientiousness personality traits on students' social adjustment

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate
1	.206 ^a	.042	.041	.451533

a. Predictors: (Constant), Neuroticism
 b. Dependent Variable: Student's Social Adjustment

Table 4. Coefficients-influence of neuroticism personality traits on students' social adjustment

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% confidence interval for B	
	B	Std. error				Lower bound	Upper bound
(Constant)	3.828	.105		36.486	.000	3.622	4.034
Neuroticism	-.179	.034	-.206	-5.227	.000	-.246	-.111

a. Dependent Variable: Student's Social Adjustment
 $Y = \alpha + \beta x + \epsilon$
 Student Social Adjustment = 2.407 + 0.278 + error term

Table 5. ANOVA- influence of neuroticism personality traits on students' social adjustment

Model	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	5.569	1	5.569	27.316	.000 ^b
Residual	125.591	53	.204		
Total	131.161	54			

a. Dependent Variable: Student's Social Adjustment

b. Predictors: (Constant), Neuroticism

In addition, Analysis of Variance was conducted to investigate whether neuroticism personality traits was a significant predictor to students' social adjustment.

From the ANOVA output (Table 5), it is evident that the slope of the population of regression line is not zero, demonstrating that Neuroticism personality traits is a significant predictor of students' social adjustment [F (1, 54) =27.316, $p=.000 <.05$; Adjusted $R^2=.041$]. This signifies that students' level of Neuroticism personality traits, have a significant effect on students' social adjustment.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study established that in general many of the undergraduate students are fairly neurotic, but they vary in their of neuroticism personality levels. This was reflected by the fact that although most of the students are emotional and frequently exhibit high emotional reactions to stress, some of them are emotionally stable and less reactive to stress. Many of the students accepted that they always become stressed out easily even with very little provocation. Equally, fairly large number of the students accepted that they often become overwhelmed by emotions. It also emerged that some of the students do things that they later regret. This was interpreted by the response of more than three out of five of the students who accepted that they always regret certain things they get involved in or do. Likewise, another group of the sampled students indicated that they often feel blue and are always afraid that they will do the wrong things.

On the contrary, another proportion of the students exhibited low neurotic personality trait. For instance, some of them were established not to be easily bothered by things, they remained calm, even in tense situations and always keep their cool. They never perceive situations as threatening and they rarely feel moody, anxious and often emotionally stable and less reactive to stress. To establish whether there was any

statistical significant relationship between neuroticism and social adjustment, the null hypothesis was tested using Pearson Moment Coefficient and regression analysis. It was concluded that there is statistically significant though negative, relationship between neuroticism personality traits and social adjustment among undergraduate students, with high level of neuroticism personality traits associated to lower social adjustment among the undergraduate students and vice-versa. A low neuroticism score can mean one is confident and have more resilience and find it easy to keep calm under stress. Relaxation might also come more easily to them. Therefore, those students low in neuroticism experience positive social adjustment. The student counsellors to assess and identify those students at risk and change their perception on changes experience at the university.

CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, respondents' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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