

EMOTIONAL STABILITY AND SOCIAL MATURITY AMONG PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the associations between emotional stability and social maturity in a sample of Psychology students from a public Romanian university. To meet the objectives of the study, we used two established personality inventories: the California Psychological Inventory (CPI) and the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R). For the Emotional Stability variable we targeted the Neuroticism Factor (NEO PI-R) and, as a complementary indicator, the Well-Being (Wb) scale (CPI). For the variable social maturity we targeted the scales in the second group of the CPI: Responsibility (Re), Socialization (So), Self-control (Sc) and Tolerance (To). Both male and female subjects reported a low level of well-being, with high Neuroticism in men, sub-average CPI scores, while women exhibited slightly below-average values on most scales. The results indicated a positive and significant relationship between emotional stability and social maturity scales. Higher levels of emotional stability were associated with better social functioning among psychology students, highlighting the importance of emotional regulation skills for effective social adaptation during academic training.

Keywords: emotional stability, psychology students, social maturity

1. INTRODUCTION

Emotional stability, wellbeing and social maturity are essential for future psychologists to manage stress, build healthy relationships, and perform well in emotionally demanding situations. Therefore, the study of these psychological dimensions is particularly important for understanding the developmental process of young individuals undergoing academic training in the field of psychology. The specialized literature emphasizes that emotional and interpersonal difficulties are not found only among the general population but also occur among mental health professionals. For example, Deacon, Kirkpatrick, Wetchler, and Niedner (1999) highlighted the prevalence of issues such as marital difficulties (almost two-thirds of respondents), relationship problems (40%), and divorce (29%) among psychotherapists. In another study, 82% of psychotherapists reported difficulties in relationships, 57% reported experiencing depression at some point in their lives, and 11% reported problems related to substance abuse (Deutsch, 1985). These data suggest that emotional vulnerability can be present both during the training period and later in professional practice. Therefore, investigating these dimensions among psychology students becomes particularly relevant, as it allows for the early identification of potential difficulties and can inform supportive interventions tailored to their needs.

Although emotional stability, wellbeing and social maturity have been studied separately, no existing Romanian-language research has specifically examined their relationship in Psychology students.

Emotional stability

Some of the earliest personality theories focused on traits, specifically characteristics that distinguish an individual. Using the factor-analytic method, researchers have identified a varying number of personality traits, with contemporary studies providing evidence for five major factors: Neuroticism (Emotional stability) (feeling often worried, anxious, or tense), Extraversion (enjoying being with others, talking, having fun, and showing affection), Openness (being imaginative, independent, creative, and willing to take risks), Agreeableness (being kind, caring, trusting, and polite), Conscientiousness (being responsible, diligent, and well-organized) (McCrae and Costa, 1987).

Neuroticism reflects emotional instability and poor impulse control, with high levels associated with negative affect such as anxiety, depression, anger, and vulnerability. Individuals scoring high on this trait are often impulsive and irritable, whereas those low in neuroticism tend to be calm and emotionally stable. The core of this factor lies in the general tendency to experience emotions such as fear, sadness, shame, anger, guilt, and disgust. Since this type of affectivity influences adaptation, the dimension also encompasses tendencies toward irrational thinking, reduced impulse control, and diminished ability to cope with stress (Minulescu, 2004).

Emotional stability (low neuroticism), defined as the capacity to maintain balanced affect and cope effectively with stress, has been the focus of numerous studies, often explored in relation to a variety of psychological and behavioral variables. Previous research has examined its links with subjective well-being, stress coping strategies, academic performance, life satisfaction, and interpersonal relationships providing a broader understanding of how emotional stability interacts with multiple aspects of individual functioning. Although these studies did not focus specifically on psychology students, their findings provide valuable insights into the relationships between emotional stability, wellbeing, and social maturity. Vittersø (2001) investigated the relationship between emotional stability, extraversion, and subjective well-being among Norwegian high school students, finding that emotional stability was a stronger predictor of subjective well-being than extraversion. Another study examined the relationship between perceived stress, emotional stability, and psychological well-being. The results showed that perceived stress is associated not only with immediate emotional reactions but also with relatively stable traits such as emotional stability, which can moderate its effect on psychological well-being, with higher stability buffering negative outcomes (Strizhitskaya, Petrash, Savenysheva, Murtazina, and Golovey, 2019). Emotional stability was found to partially mediate the association between positive psychological traits—namely mindfulness, grit, and adaptability—and academic burnout, emphasizing its pivotal contribution to the maintenance of student well-being (Sarwer, Abid, Chao, Luo, and Dukhaykh, 2025). Although conducted on primary and secondary school students, a Chinese study showed that emotional stability significantly predicts academic achievement even after controlling for demographic factors (Liu, 2025). High emotional stability is associated with lower anxiety, greater self-confidence, and more effective emotional regulation, making it a critical factor in academic and social success (Costa and McCrae, 1992; Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham, 2003). Empirical evidence suggests that neuroticism (low emotional stability) also plays an important role in shaping interpersonal relationships. The results of a meta-analysis suggest that traits from the Five-Factor Model—particularly Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Neuroticism, along with specific facets such as

altruism, compliance, deliberation, and angry hostility—are consistently associated with antisocial and aggressive behaviors (Jones, Miller, and Lynam, 2011).

Social maturity

Social maturity refers to an individual's ability to internalize social norms and values, act responsibly, regulate impulses, and interact adaptively within social contexts. Within the framework of the California Psychological Inventory (CPI; Gough, 1987), this construct is represented by the Self-Control and Socialization cluster, which integrates several related dimensions. Responsibility reflects dependability and conscientiousness in fulfilling obligations; Socialization captures adherence to societal norms and avoidance of antisocial tendencies; Self-Control assesses the regulation of impulses and emotional restraint; and Tolerance denotes open-mindedness and acceptance of differing perspectives. Collectively, these facets conceptualize social maturity as a multidimensional personality attribute encompassing both behavioral regulation and socially adaptive attitudes. These traits are widely interpreted as indicators of successful social functioning, adaptability, and integration into structured environments, such as academic or occupational settings (Megargee, 1972; Gough and Bradley, 1996).

Emotional stability significantly supports social maturity through multiple interconnected mechanisms. Emotional stability, defined as one's capacity to remain calm under stress, directly correlates with improved social adjustment in workplace settings. Studies show a significant negative correlation between emotional stability and social maladjustment among working adults (Bhagat et al., 2015). Research on personality traits and self-control reveals complex relationships involving neuroticism, conscientiousness, and socialization processes. Nilsen et al. (2024) found that while conscientiousness positively correlates with all self-control dimensions, neuroticism negatively moderates the relationship between conscientiousness and self-control, as well as between extraversion and self-control. This suggests neuroticism plays a critical role in determining how other personality traits influence self-control abilities. Mikheeva (2020) identified responsibility as fundamental to personality functioning, linking normal responsibility levels to healthy perfectionism and well-being, while both low and high responsibility levels can associate with neurotic perfectionism and reduced well-being. Emotionally stable individuals demonstrate greater competence in building positive relationships and maintaining comfort in social situations (Bazyka, 2023).

Psychology Students as Research Participants

Studies show that psychology students tend to score high on Agreeableness, Neuroticism, and Openness compared to other groups. More introverted psychology students tend to achieve better academic results (Vedel, Thomsen, Larsen, 2015).

Upmane, Gaitniece-Putāne, and Šmitiņa (2016) found that the primary motivations for studying psychology were interest in the field and a desire to help others. Personality traits were associated with these professional motives: Agreeableness and Conscientiousness positively correlated with the desire to help, Extraversion with perceived professional competence, and Neuroticism with uncertainty regarding career choice.

Although resilience and personal maturity were not directly measured in the present study, previous research on psychology students provides relevant insights. For example, Kovalova, Gryshko, Miroschnychenko and Reznikova (2024) found that resilience is closely associated with personal maturity, particularly in areas such as interpersonal connection, risk-taking, life attitudes, and self-regulation. These findings suggest that resilience and hardiness are important components of mature personality, supporting students' ability to manage challenges and promote personal growth.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The objectives of the study were:

- to assess the level of emotional stability, well-being, and social maturity in Psychology students from a public Romanian university
- to assess the associations between emotional stability, well-being, and social maturity in a sample of psychology students from a public Romanian university

Our general hypothesis was:

There is a relationship between emotional stability and social maturity among Psychology students.

Participants

A total of 79 Psychology students from a public university responded to the questionnaires. Participants reported an average age of 25.81 years old ($SD=9.19$), with a range of 20 to 51. The majority of the participants identified as female ($N = 68 - 86,1\%$), followed by male ($N = 11 - 13,9\%$).

The participants completed the measures in person. They received an invitation to participate in the study, and their participation was entirely voluntary.

Measures

Two established psychological tests were used to assess personality characteristics.

California Psychological Inventory (Harrison Gough)

A trait model based questionnaire that aims to assess personality through concepts that ordinary people use in their daily lives to describe and understand their own behavior and that of others.

The California Psychological Inventory (CPI), developed by Harrison G. Gough, is a personality assessment tool designed to evaluate aspects of personality that are important for interpersonal effectiveness, social interaction, and everyday adjustment. CPI focuses on characteristics of normal personality and aims to describe how individuals are typically perceived by others in social contexts. In the version employed in this study, the instrument contains 480 self-report items, each requiring a dichotomous response ("Yes" or "No"). These items are organized into a set of 18 folk scales (such as Dominance, Sociability, Responsibility, and Self-Acceptance). The structure of the CPI allows for the derivation of higher-order dimensions that capture interpersonal style, normative orientation, and cognitive as well as role-related tendencies.

The CPI has been translated, culturally adapted, and validated for use with the Romanian population, ensuring linguistic equivalence and conceptual fidelity to the original version. Empirical studies have consistently supported its psychometric robustness. Reliability estimates for most scales are satisfactory, while validity evidence supports both its construct and predictive utility. The CPI has demonstrated particular relevance in educational, counseling, and organizational contexts, where it provides valuable insights into social behavior and personality functioning in everyday life.

NEO Personality Inventory – Revised (NEO PI-R) (Paul Costa and Robert McCrae)

The NEO Personality Inventory – Revised (NEO PI-R), developed by Paul T. Costa and Robert R. McCrae, is one of the most widely used self-report instruments for assessing personality within the framework of the Five-Factor Model (FFM). The inventory is specifically designed to measure the five broad dimensions of personality: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. Each of these domains is further broken down into six more specific facets, allowing for a nuanced assessment of personality across 30 facet scales. In total, the instrument comprises 240 items, each rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree." This response format enables the capture of gradations in personality traits, ensuring both precision and sensitivity in assessment. The NEO PI-R has also been adapted

and standardized for the Romanian population. Translation and back-translation procedures, along with cultural adaptation processes, have ensured conceptual equivalence of the items. Psychometric studies conducted on Romanian samples have confirmed the reliability and validity of the instrument.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

For the Emotional Stability variable we targeted the Neuroticism Factor (NEO PI-R) and the Well-Being (Wb) (CPI), as a complementary indicator. The results of the subjects indicate the following:

Table 1: Means and standard deviations of factors / scales targeting Emotional stability for females and males

	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Neuroticism (N)	male	11	86,27	26,691	8,048
	female	68	85,76	22,898	2,777
Well-Being (Wb)	male	11	32,09	8,455	2,549
	female	68	32,96	5,936	,720

Scores relative to norms indicate a high level of Neuroticism in male subjects, and slightly above average (still within the mean range) in female subjects. Both groups report a low level of Wellbeing.

For the variable Social Maturity we targeted the scales in the second group of the CPI: Responsibility (Re), Socialization (So), Self-Control (Sc), Tolerance (To). The results of the subjects indicate the following:

Table 2: Means and standard deviations of factors / scales targeting Social Maturity for female and male

	gen	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Responsibility	male	11	28,09	5,594	1,687
	female	68	27,46	4,386	,532
Socialization	male	11	34,91	7,752	2,337
	female	68	35,81	5,877	,713
Self-Control	male	11	31,82	8,897	2,683
	female	68	27,00	9,627	1,167
Tolerance	male	11	20,45	7,299	2,201
	female	68	19,87	7,184	,871

Scores relative to norms indicate in the case of male subjects, a level below average at all CPI scales, with a significantly lower score at the Responsibility and Socialization scales. In the case of female subjects, we identified a slightly below average level (but in the average range) at all CPI scales.

No statistically significant differences were found regarding the study variables in relation to gender.

Correlational analysis

The correlations between Psychology students' Emotional Stability and Social Maturity were computed using Spearman tests, because of the asymmetry of their distributions.

Table 3: Correlations between Emotional Stability and Social Maturity (Psychology students)

		Responsibility	Socialization	Self-Control	Tolerance
Well-Being	Correlation Coefficient	,531**	,335**	,592**	,624**
	p	,000	,003	,000	,000
Neuroticism	Correlation Coefficient	-,567**	-,341**	-,614**	-,659**
	p	,000	,002	,000	,000

Correlation analyses revealed distinct patterns of associations between the examined personality traits and both Wellbeing and Neuroticism. Wellbeing was positively and significantly associated with all adaptive personality dimensions. Moderate to strong correlations were observed with Responsibility ($r = .531$, $p < .001$), Socialization ($r = .335$, $p = .003$), Self-Control ($r = .592$, $p < .001$), and Tolerance ($r = .624$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of these traits are linked to greater wellbeing. Conversely, Neuroticism demonstrated significant negative correlations with the same traits. Moderate to strong negative correlations were found with Responsibility ($r = -.567$, $p < .001$), Socialization ($r = -.341$, $p = .002$), Self-Control ($r = -.614$, $p < .001$), and Tolerance ($r = -.659$, $p < .001$), suggesting that higher levels of neuroticism are associated with lower levels of adaptive personality characteristics.

Discussions

The results of our study highlight certain psychological aspects that warrant attention from mental health professionals. Our research participants, Psychology students, exhibited low levels of Emotional Stability and Well-being, with significantly lower emotional stability observed in male participants (reflecting a tendency to experience emotions such as fear, sadness, shame, anger, guilt, and disgust, and to be vulnerable to stress) and low well-being (characterized by reduced vitality and difficulties coping with daily life demands) observed in both genders. Additionally, psychology students scored below average in areas related to responsibility, socialization, tolerance, and self-control. These low levels indicate potential adaptation difficulties among the participants.

Well-being was found to be positively correlated with responsibility, tolerance, self-control, and socialization. Dimensions of social maturity enhance autonomy, emotional stability, relationships, and overall well-being. Conversely, neuroticism was negatively correlated with these dimensions of social maturity. This can be explained by the characteristic emotional instability, anxiety, and negative affect associated with neuroticism, all of which impair adaptive functioning in these areas.

These outcomes may reflect either a preexisting vulnerability that attracts students to psychology to better understand and manage their own challenges, or the high academic and emotional demands of the field. Findings across studies consistently showed that psychology students scored higher on Neuroticism compared with students from other academic fields (Vedel, 2016).

Previous studies have examined whether personality differences across academic majors stem from pre-existing traits or from socialization within faculties. Most studies assessed students later in their programs, allowing for potential environmental influence, but two studies (Lievens et al., 2002; Vedel et al., 2015) measured personality immediately after enrollment. Their findings, consistent with later assessments, suggest that these differences largely reflect pre-existing individual traits

rather than faculty-specific socialization. Students choose their university and field of study based on how compatible it is with their personality, whether consciously or unconsciously (Vedel, 2016).

4. CONCLUSIONS

The findings highlight significant mental health vulnerabilities among psychology students, characterized by low levels of well-being and heightened neuroticism, which increase the risk of stress and anxiety. Deficiencies in responsibility, tolerance, self-control, and socialization may further compromise their professional capacity to provide effective support to others. These results underscore the necessity of integrating structured mental health resources and training in emotional regulation and resilience into psychology curricula. Early and targeted interventions are essential to foster both the personal development of students and their future professional effectiveness.

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