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Neuroticism Personality Trait and Stress Resilience among Teacher Counsellors in Secondary Schools in Kakamega County, Kenya

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Abstract: *Personality traits comprise of behavior patterns that reveal the individual's character and expose their abilities. An individual's reaction to any given situation is dictated by their personality. Personality could however be compromised by lack of stress resilience. Stress is physio-mental anguish resulting from prolonged frustration and sensed defeat. Resilience rejuvenates, alleviates anguishes and restores normalcy. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between Neuroticism personality trait and stress resilience among teacher counsellors in secondary schools within Kakamega County, Kenya. The study was guided by the General Adaptation Syndrome theory of stress management and Seligman's 3P's theory of resilience. The correlational survey design was used. The target population was 327 teacher counsellors in sub county secondary schools in Kakamega County Kenya. The sample size of 181 teacher counsellors who were the participants was selected through purposeful sampling; stratified random sampling and simple random sampling. Data collection was done using questionnaires adopted from the Big Five Inventory (BFI) tool which has a published reliability coefficient of 0.8, and the Ego-Resiliency Scale (ER89) that has a published reliability coefficient of 0.7. A pilot study was done in neighboring Bungoma County. Content validity and expert opinion from psychology department Laikipia University Kenya was used to verify the validity of the instruments. Data was presented in frequency tables, graphs and charts and was analyzed using Pearson's correlation. The findings indicated that Neuroticism personality trait was negatively correlated to stress resilience at a coefficiency of 0.3678. Consequently, the hypothesis was rejected at the significant level of .05. Results showed strong relationship between neuroticism and stress resilience. It was concluded that Neuroticism had characteristics that empowered individuals to be single-minded and self-motivated. These empowering characteristics were found to be hidden in the repercussions of the neurotics' supportive traits. They caused the neurotic teacher counsellors to embrace their responsibilities with enthusiasm and competence. The study recommends that the teacher counsellors must understand their personality traits and know how personality influences the advancement of resilience. Neuroticism personality trait will improve the teacher counsellors' competence.*

Key words: *Neuroticism traits, Personality Traits, Stress Resilience, Hidden Strength, Repercussions*

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INTRODUCTION

Neuroticism is one of The Big Five Personality Traits, amongst Extroversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness – developed in 1949 by D. W. Fiske **(**Oliver et al., 2008**)**. These five comprise the continuum of personality traits within which every individual falls, (Darkwah, 2013). The five have often been discuss as a block and are constantly considered in view of each other. This study endeavors to show how neuroticism personality trait could stimulate stress resilience among teacher counsellors and empower them to perform competently regardless of their stressful work environment. School counselling is jeopardized by dual responsibility; additional duty assignments and work overload. Good teacher counsellors are valued for their academic-input rather than their counselling prowess. This makes the school environment an unfriendly workplace for the teacher counsellors who are keen on offering psychological therapy to learners in school.

The study was carried out in Kakamega County, Kenya. Kakamega is one of the forty seven counties in the country. The county has a high number of secondary schools (MOEST, 2019). This study found that the schools had teacher counsellors who offered counselling services to the learners as required of them by the Ministry of Education (MOEST, 2016). These teacher counselors, were found to be teaching two basic subjects in the schools (MOEST 2019) as required by their employer, - Teachers' Service Commission (TSC). The teacher counsellors were also assigned other responsibilities by their administrators, which included, class teacher, co-curriculum teacher or teacher on duty (TOD) alongside their counselling duties. These added responsibilities greatly overwhelm the teacher counsellors, causing them stress and curtailing their psychological comfort. Curtailed psychological comfort caused the teacher counsellors adverse effects such as discussed by Rokonuzzaman and Rahman, (2011). They included low self-esteem, poor interpersonal relationship, temperamental reactions and self-isolation. It was against this background that Kakamega County was chosen for the investigation of the relationship between neuroticism personality trait and stress resilience among teacher counsellors in secondary schools. A pilot study was carried out in Bungoma, a neighboring County that experienced similar challenges for teacher counsellors in the secondary schools.

Personality is a stable organized collection of psychological qualities and mechanisms in the human person that arise from biological and environmental factors (Larsen & Buss, 2010). Our personality springs from our psychology. It is an assortment of mental and emotional features like judgements, sensations and instincts generated over time through the impact of the environment on the individual's inherent abilities. Personality contributes to the individual's idea of who he or she is and therefore is an element of one's distinctiveness.

Personality Traits are descriptive adjectives that define human behavior or character (Saeed et al., 2018). Personality traits are a significant asset in every individual's life because through them ones behavior, inclinations and habitual reactions - their identity - are revealed (De Terte,

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2014). Personality traits distinguish specific qualities and reveal enduring character features in an individual. Personality traits are the source of character strength that enables the individual to perform competently at work and adequately in all daily engagements (Darkwah, 2014). This study examines the relationship between neuroticism personality trait and stress resilience among teacher counsellors in secondary schools in Kakamega County Kenya.

Resilience is the ability to successfully rebound back to normalcy and rejuvenation after difficult and challenging experiences in life (Southwick et al., 2005). It is the self-adaptation and change within one's circumstantial realities through mental, emotional, and behavioral modification and adjustment. The purpose of this study was to investigate whether neuroticism as a personality trait could influence the development of the teacher counsellors' stress resilience and thus enable them to perform competently and generate an output of students with high emotional and social intelligence. Successful counselling in school will produce youth who will be able to withstand society pressures and emerge as community solution finders. Teacher counsellors play a very important role preparing the youth to identify and manage their issues early in life (Oketch & Kimemia, 2012). They handle all the psychological, academic and social issues that malign the learners and curtail their self-progression. Timely counselling arrests individual issues before they culminate into mental challenges that disorient the human mind. Counselling guarantees individual psychological wellbeing, mental fitness and physical aptness (Nelson-Jones, 2011). Teacher counsellors require strong personality traits that enable them to develop stress resilience as they offer services within institutions that have unfriendly internal and external demands (Silsil, 2011). Neuroticism like all the big five personality trait has supportive underlying qualities. These qualities – such as passionate, obsessive, apprehensive – empower the individuals and make them resilient to stress.

Among the Big Five Personality Traits, Neuroticism is seldom appreciated (Netter et al., 2020). This is because most people often focus on the controversy in its supporting traits. This failure to appreciate neuroticism is also due to comparison with the other four traits. Barlow et al., (2014) found neurotics to be emotionally insecure and constantly threatened by phobia for change and adventure. These researchers established that neurotic individuals were unstable and fronted suspicion in most of their involvements. Such labeling erodes most people's appreciation of the neurotics. Van Aarde et al. (2017) observed that neuroticism stood out as unique, among the Big Five Personality Traits. This uniqueness was attributed to the fact that neuroticism had its reactions generated from the repercussions of its supportive traits. This meant that the neurotics' supportive traits that seemed negative had great hidden strength. The strength was realized in subsequent reactions to the prevailing circumstances like excessive phobia giving rise to ones precaution and vigilance. Neurotic teacher counsellors showed keenness and precision that was linked to their obsession. They also showed determination and loyalty as an effect of their insecurity. Eysenck identified anxiety, fanaticism, obsession, temper, jealousy and resentfulness, as tributary boosters for neuroticism (Netter et al., 2020). These attributes lack positivity and seem to drag the individual backwards into disassociative interaction. However, this study found

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that they enhanced hidden strength that inspired positivity in the neurotics. Barlow et al., (2014) also established that neuroticism had neither desirable qualities nor positive cohesion and was lacking in character strength. This negativity was accentuated by directly paralleling neuroticism with the attractive traits in the other four personality traits (Bakker et al., 2010). However, when analyzed in isolation without comparisons, neurotics ironically displayed very strong will-power and individual self-belief. As such, the current study intended to examine neuroticism personality trait and stress resilience among teacher counsellors in secondary schools in Kakamega county Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

In this study carried out in Kakamega County, Kenya, the research method used was the correlation research design. The correlation research design is a design that investigates the relationships between variables without exacting any controls or employing any forms of manipulation (Price et al., 2017). The study's concern was to examine the relationship between neuroticism personality trait and stress resilience among teacher counsellors in secondary schools. In order to work competently at their stations teacher counsellors require to be empowered with stress resilience. It was significant that the source of this resilience be identified for sustainability. The study respondents had to relate their habits, achievements and inclinations to specific traits of their personality in order to determine the source of their resilience.

The population of the study consisted of all the teacher counsellors from all the sub-county secondary schools in all the ministry of education sub-counties in Kakamega County, Kenya. Kakamega County, has a total of 327 sub-county secondary schools spread out within the twelve sub-counties of the ministry of education (MOE, 2019). Each of the sub-county secondary school has a single teacher counselor posted by the employer, TSC. This defined the target population as 327 teacher counsellors. Though the schools have appointed assistant teacher counsellors to assist in the counselling offices, the study interviewed only the teacher counselors who were in-charge of the counselling departments in the schools.

The sample size was drawn from Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling table for fixed population sizes and was found to be 181 teacher counsellors. These specific 181 teacher counsellors were selected through purposeful sampling, stratified random sampling and simple random sampling. The 181 had to be teachers responsible for counselling learners in their respective schools. This is purposeful sampling where the choice was determined by the position the teacher held in the school. The identification of the 181 secondary schools from which the teacher counsellors were selected was done through proportionate stratified random sampling. This is an unequal sampling method done in proportion to the sample strata in relation to the size of the population identified (Borden & Abbott, 2016).

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The number of secondary schools to be selected per sub-county was worked out by the total number of secondary schools in the said sub-county being divided by the population of the study (n/N), and multiplied by the sample size required. The equating calculation was done as follows

$$x = \frac{n}{327} \times 181$$

Identifying the specific school from which the participant was to be picked was done through simple random sampling (Law, 2009). This involved randomly assigning numbers to all the schools in the sub-county; randomly picking from the numbered lot, the total needed from that sub-county; and identifying the name of the school by the number picked. The participants for the study were selected from the named schools through the non-probability, purposive sampling procedure which selected participants basing on a predetermined criteria as explained by Borden and Abbott (2016). Purposive sampling in this study was pegged on the criteria that the participants were the main persons in charge of the guidance and counselling program in the selected secondary schools.

Data was collected by use of the Big Five Inventory (BFI) modified by Naumann and Soto, (2008) and the Ego-Resiliency Scale (ER89) that was developed by Block and Kremen (1996). The BFI is a self-report instrument that has short, easy to understand and answer questions that can be comfortably used by respondents to give exhaustive information as required. It inquires into the individuals' reactions to issues affecting them during different situations, and this made it suitable to establish the teacher counsellors' personality traits and the level of strength of their characteristics. The items in the instrument were customized and scaled down to suit the study.

The Ego-Resiliency Scale (ER89) has clearly stated items that are easy to answer. They establish a person's level of resilience. This tool was likewise customized to fit this current study's objective. Both tools are standardized, published tools with validity accepted through peer ratings. The Big Five Inventory (BFI) tool has a published reliability coefficient of 0.8, and the Ego-Resiliency Scale (ER89) has a published reliability coefficient of 0.7. The tools were administered with the help of research assistants after official permission from relevant authorities such as the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) had been obtained. The research adhered to all the ethics and moral obligations owing to this discipline: - the social sciences. The distribution and collection of questionnaire was 100 % effective because the research assistants visited the particular schools to administer to a specific participant and left the school with the filled questionnaire. The sampled 181 teacher counsellors belonged to all the big five personality traits and this paper narrowed down to neuroticism personality trait and how it related to stress resilience.

The data analysis was done by first editing, coding and grouping all the obtained data in relation to the study variables and objective before further examination. It was analyzed using Pearson's

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correlation with the help of the Microsoft Excel Statistics. The analyzed data results were presented in form of frequency distribution tables, charts and graphs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The study sought to establish whether the supportive traits in a person with neuroticism personality could motivate the development of stress resilience in the person and help the individual to perform competently even if the workplace was stressful. Background information on gender, education and trainings in counselling was collected because it affected the participant's trend of responding.

The gender distribution was found to be almost half (11 Male and 13 Females). Majority of the interviewed teacher counsellors had attained a bachelor's degree in education, (19 bachelor's degree, 3 master's degree and 2 diplomas). All had training in counselling with the majority of 16 having bachelor's degree in counselling. One had attained a master's degree and four had diplomas in counselling. There were three who had certificates in counselling. The background information was as indicated in Figure 1.

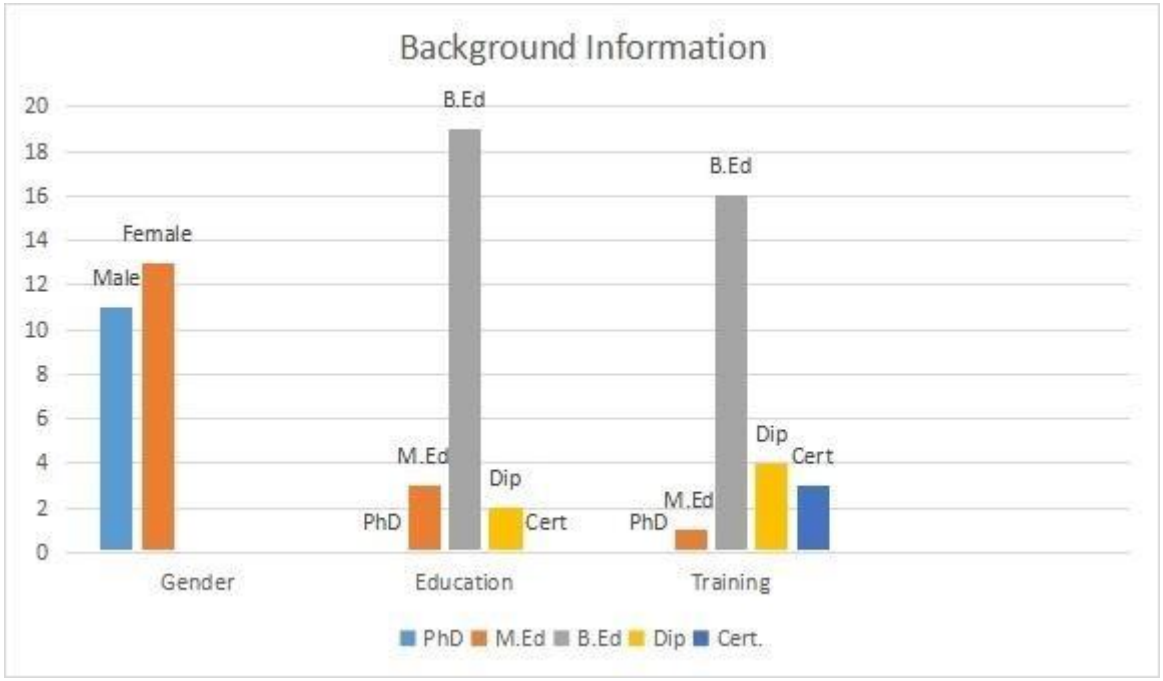


Figure 1 Background Information (Gender, Education, Counselling Training)

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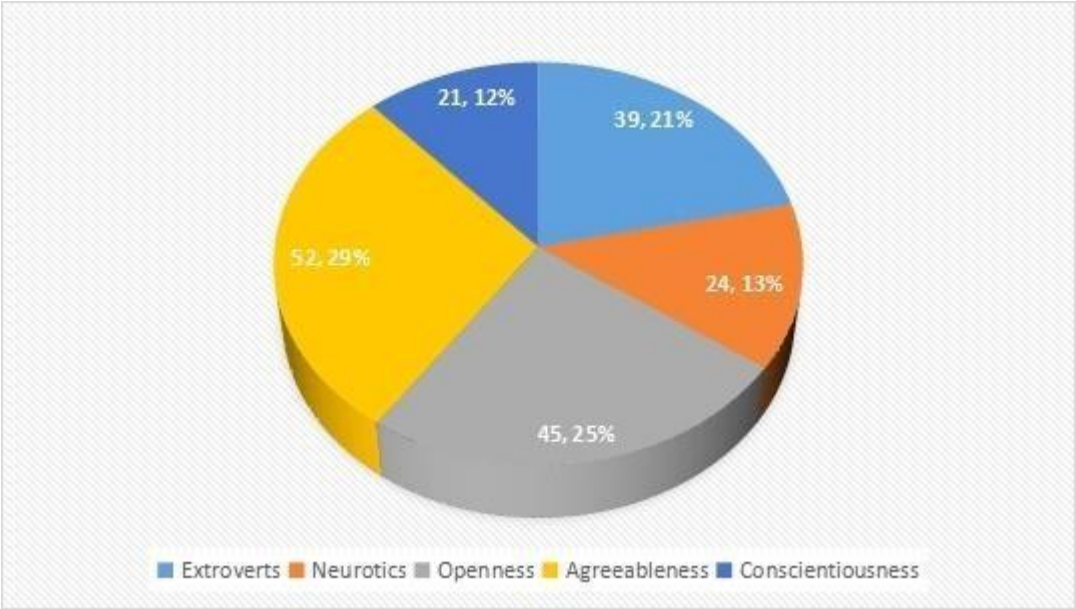


Figure 2 Total and Percentages of Teacher Counsellors per Personality Trait

Personality traits are very essential because they play a big role in determining the way an individual behaves in particular situations such as being under stress. This study investigated the relationship between neuroticism personality trait and stress resilience among teacher counsellors in secondary schools in Kakamega County, Kenya.

The twenty four teacher counsellors who had neuroticism as their main personality trait were identified because they responded positively to the supportive traits that were underlying to neuroticism as a main trait. The responses were as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1
Teacher Counsellors' Responses to Neuroticism Indicators.

Neuroticism Trait Supporting Indicators	VA	MA	IN	N/A	DK	Total
Easily nervous and find it hard to trust other people.	20 (83.3%)	3(12.5%)	1(4.2%)	0	0	24
Once set on doing something I pursue it through without entertaining destructions or interferences.	17 (70.8%)	5(20.8%)	2(8.3%)	0	0	24
Hardly venture into anything new until sure	12 (50%)	9(37.5%)	3(12.5%)	0	0	24
Prefer work that is within set rules.	22 (91.6%)	2(8.3%)	0	0	0	24
I tend to find fault with others.	24 (100%)	0	0	0	0	24
Total Responses	95	19	6	0	0	----

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As evident from the collected data tabulated in table 1 the responses revealed strong decisiveness. Out of the 24 neurotic teacher counsellors, 83% indicated that they easily got nervous and found it hard to trust other people. They showed that the indicator was Very Applicable (VA) to them. Generally nervousness is an indication of worry and anxiety. It is a major component of phobia that is the key description of a neurotic person. Neurotic teacher counsellors showed that they hardly ventured into anything new. 50% of them responded with VA to this indicator. The data collected from these neurotic teachers showed that 92% of them preferred work that was within set rules. This was attributed to their fear of venturing into the unknown. The fear that enslaved them to stipulated regulations. All the 24 confirmed that they tended to find fault with others. Neurotics were found to be suspicious and lacked trust. This finding was seen to be similar to what was found by Netter et al., (2020) who stated that neurotics often failed to have self-belief because they were dominated by intense fear. These responses showed that neurotic persons had character attributes like nervous, suspicious, reserved and judgmental that lacked positivity. This findings are in agreement with the findings by Barlow et al. (2014) which indicated that neuroticism had neither desirable qualities nor positive cohesion and were lacking in character strength. These attributes branded neurotics as lacking healthy interrelation.

The neurotics' responses suggested that they were likely to be weighed down by their own disassociative nature. Contrarily, analysis of additional data collected showed that these seemingly negative supportive traits generated hidden strength that inspired and gave the neurotics strong will-power plus self-drive. This finding was in agreement with what Tuteja & Sharma, (2017) found when they stated that self-control and enthusiasm enabled neurotics to take charge of themselves and their resolutions. The data collected from the neurotic teacher counsellors indicated that they responded to the resilience indicators with great positivity. This showed that neuroticism was strongly related to resilience. The responses to resilience indicators are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 *Neurotic Teacher Counsellors' Responses to Resilience Indicators*

Resilience Indicators	frequencies	Percentage (181)
Manage anger well	81	45.51
Recover fast from startles	64	35.36
Find people likeable	33	18.23
Explore new and different things	2	1.10
Contemplate carefully before acting	1	0.55

The major trait indicators for neuroticism: - fault finding with others and lack of trust for other people that scored 100% and 83% respectively were interpreted to suggest that the teachers took extra precaution to examine and re-examine everything they dealt with in order to eliminate doubt and suspicion. This explained the positive responses to the resilience indicators. The positive findings are similar to research findings by Rothman and Coetzer, (2003) which stated that

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neurotics were reserved, independent and even-paced. They were found to be always treading with caution and were always apprehensive. The data collected showed by 91.6% that the neurotic teacher counsellors reclined in habitual behavior where the path followed was laid out by the institutions procedures and controls. They were attracted to working in the seclusion of set rules that governed behavior and created a safe zone. Findings similar to these were further made by Rothman and Coetzer who ascertained that neurotics did not jump into action before confirming all the facts involved.

A Pearson's correlation analysis done on the data collected, found that the correlation between neurotic personality trait and stress resilience was 0.3678. From this Correlation value, it was evident that the neuroticism trait and stress resilience were weakly positive correlated. This led to the rejection of the null hypothesis and to the conclusion that there was a relationship between the neuroticism personality trait and stress resilience among the teacher counsellors in secondary schools. The teacher counsellors showed that they had the relevant characteristics that made them resilient in stressful circumstances. The results of this study established that there was a strong relationship between neuroticism as a personality trait and stress resilience. The relationship was as indicated in Figure 3.

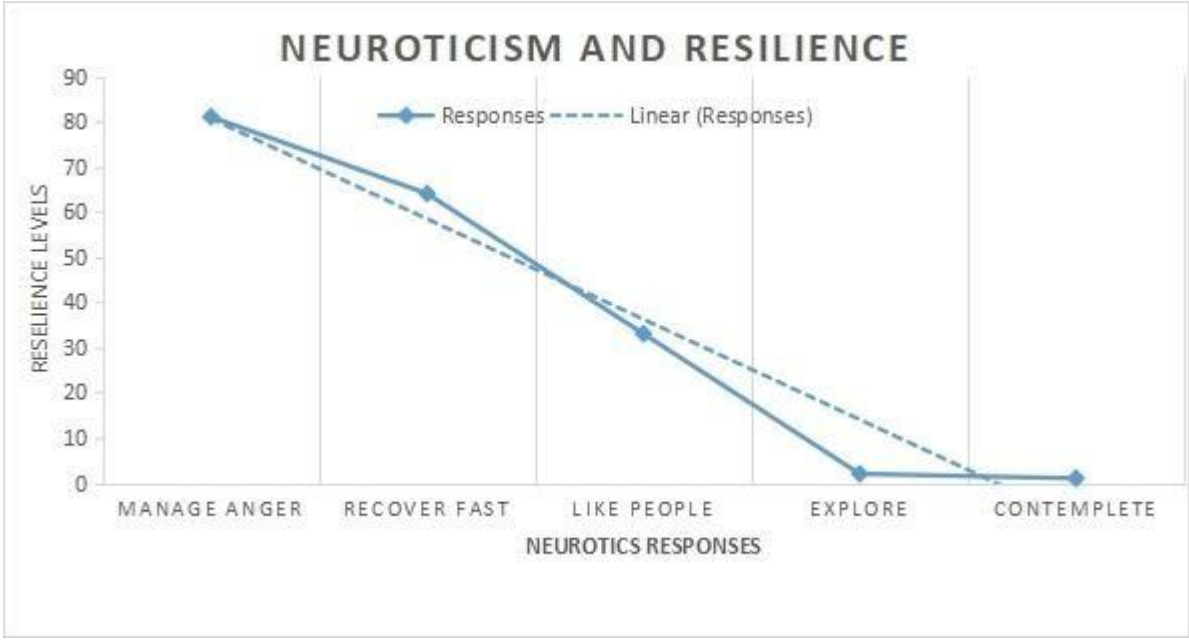


Figure 3 Relationship between Neurotic Trait and Resilience

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Neurotic persons have their strength hidden in the repercussions of their displayed traits (Tuteja & Sharma 2017). What a neurotic exposes often covers up the actual reaction to the situation. He or she will exhibit fear yet in practice will put up a lot of strict precaution. It is in the light of these revelations that the study found 46% of the neurotics to be able to manage their anger well. Although they are known for being temperamental and phobic (Netter et al., 2020) the results of the data analysis showed that 35% recovered fast from traumatic experiences and 18% found other people to be likeable. These are character tendencies that linked the neurotic teacher counsellors to resilience.

The neurotic persons' precautions that kept them away from impulsiveness played a big role in keeping their behavior in check. They showed that they were fault-finders and hardly trusted others. Neurotics will often settle only for their own individual ways of doing things owing to their phobia and suspicion. The results also showed that neurotics took their time before acting and controlled their anger 46%. They were careful in their approach to people and thus prioritized knowing and understanding people before venturing in relating with them. The analysis of the data collected took into account the character strength of the neurotic persons (Rothman & Coetzer, 2003) that is entrenched in the experiences that came with their observable reactions. These entrenched character strengths brought out the positive side of the person with the neurotic personality trait. The character strengths empowered the individuals and enabled them to overcome stress and generate resilience. Teacher counsellors with neuroticism were found to be resilient and able to competently carry out counselling duties to the learners in secondary schools.

The results of the analyzed data concerning Neuroticism and successful counselling in secondary schools in Kakamega County showed negative indications. They found it to be unsuccessful. Only 13.8 % of the Neurotic teacher counsellors interviewed indicated that the counselling indicators provided in the questionnaires were Very Accurate (VA). Majority (47.2%) of the neurotic teacher counsellors marked the indicators of successful counselling as being Inaccurate (IN), while quite a considerable number (29.2%) thought the indicators were only moderately accurate (MA). For the Neurotic teacher counsellors therefore, counselling in secondary schools in Kakamega county did not take place to their satisfaction. The data was as indicated in Table 3.

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Table 3
Neuroticism Responses to Successful Counselling in school

Indicators for Counselling Success	VA	MA	IN	N/A	DK	Tot
Counselling's highly valued by staff and students in my school	2(8%)	8	10	3	1	24
The administration strongly supports counseling in my school	1(4%)	3	19	1	0	24
We have many success stories in our counselling department.	7(29%)	10	5	2	0	24
Personality traits are significant for service delivery.	21(87%)	2	1	0	0	24
Stress resilience allows unrestricted counselling navigation	23(96%)	1	0	0	0	24
Total	54	24	35	6	1	--

Although neurotics have been found by other researchers to question and critic everything they are involved in (Barlow et al., 2014), these findings about counselling in secondary schools in Kakamega County reveal the indifference of the school communities towards the significance of counselling. Only 2 (8%) out of the 24 neurotic teacher counsellors indicated that counselling was highly valued by both staff and students in the schools. They found the support of the schools' administration as lacking because only one (4%) gave an indication of very accurate (VA) as the response for this indicator. Having inspiring success stories in their counselling department was moderately accurate (MA) for majority of them as seen in these responses. However these neurotic teacher counsellors unanimously agreed that personality traits were significant for service delivery (87.5 %, VA) and that stress resilience allowed unrestricted counselling navigation for the teacher counsellor (95.8 %, VA). The poor responses to the successful counselling in schools was taken to be an implication of the unfriendly environment within which the teacher counsellors had to function. It was interpreted as a source of stress for the neurotic teacher counsellors. The unfriendly environment that led to stress was the major reason as to why personality traits were considered significant for growth of resilience for successful counselling in secondary schools. Personality traits created positive character strength (Fayambo, 2010).

CONCLUSION

This study examining the relationship between neuroticism personality traits and stress resilience generated results that led to a number of conclusions. The following conclusions were drawn from the study results:

There is a strong relationship between neuroticism as a personality trait and stress resilience. The supportive traits that Neurotic persons possess such as phobia, obsession and suspicion are intense and have great impact on the individual. They act as a drive for the formation of individual strong character for preventive measures.

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The general negative attitude leveled against neuroticism is superficial and requires more research to be done. People with neurotic personality sought to be examined and appreciated as individuals rather than be judged against the aggressive extroverts or the conscientious achievers. Neurotics have values that are deeply rooted and are hardly changed. These values often generate positive character.

Neuroticism has hidden potential that inspire great positivity. A neurotic individual's character is formed by the repercussions of their descriptive or secondary traits. These secondary traits that are all cautionary place the neurotics on the alert and they strive to avoid flaws. This strict avoidance of flaws generates strong positive character in the neurotic individuals.

Personality traits are key to humanity because they shape human behavior patterns and trends of reaction. They determine each individual's course of action in the face of the various occurrences within the society. Each individual falls under one or more of the big five personality traits as disclosed by Wolf and Weissing, (2010). Since none of the big five personality traits is subordinate to the other, neurotic teacher counsellors are as competent and suitable for school counselling as the teachers with the other personalities.

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