

## The Role of Personality Traits in Prediction of Perceived Rejection, Age Feeling, and Social Exclusion in Retirees

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate the role of personality traits in prediction of perceived rejection, age feeling, and social exclusion among retirees in Zahedan city. The statistical population of this study includes all retirees in Zahedan city in 2021 – 2022, of which 123 people were selected as samples through the convenience sampling method. To collect data for this study, questionnaires on personality traits, cognitive health, perception of rejection, feeling of aging, and social isolation were used. Pearson correlation coefficient, stepwise multiple regression, and simple linear regression were used to analyze the research data. The results showed that the perception of rejection had a positive and significant correlation with neuroticism ( $p < .05$ ) and a negative and significant correlation with extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness ( $p < .01$ ). However, there was no significant correlation between perceived exclusion and openness to experience. According to the results of the study, it can be concluded that personality traits play a significant role in predicting perceived exclusion, feeling of aging, and social isolation in retirees.

### Introduction

One of the important stages of life is retirement age. This age is a potentially challenging issue in the old age period that has many effects on various aspects of the life of older people. Retirement can be defined as the period of ending employment and overwork and activity (World Health Organization, 2015) and freedom from the duties, structures, time frames and other limitations that are created for the individual by working (Stein, 2000). The famous theorist of psychosocial development psychology Erikson believes that in the final stage of psychosocial development, namely maturity and old age, individuals are faced with a choice between self-integration and despair. These attitudes affect the way individuals evaluate their entire lives. At this stage, individuals' important efforts are completed or near completion and individuals review and reflect on their lives (Schultz and Schultz, 2016). Studies have shown that a range of positive and negative psychological and social changes, such as fear, stress, or a combination of the two, occur during retirement (Ryser and Wernli, 2017). Given the above scientific evidence, it can be acknowledged that retirement and old age are associated with psychological changes.

One of the important topics of psychology is personality because its main focus is on topics such as learning, motivation, intelligence, reasoning, reflection, emotions and feelings, intellect and wisdom, and



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the like (Shamloo, 2005). Personality can be defined as specific patterns of reflection and reasoning, emotion, behavior and action that give an individual a particular method and style in dealing with the social and material environment around him. In other words, personality consists of more or less stable and enduring characteristics that can be described by characteristics such as irritability, wandering, talkativeness, and introversion or extroversion, etc. Personality is influenced by two factors: heredity and environment (Hopwood et al., 2001).

With the increase in the number of elderly people, changes in social values and lifestyles have led to the exclusion of many elderly people from their families and, as a result, forcing the elderly to live independently. It seems that neglect and harm to the elderly are related to the cultural infrastructure of societies, which has transmitted a set of negative perceptions about the elderly to other people (Blakemore, 2010). Many researchers emphasize that social exclusion is a dynamic and organized stage and that social institutions of society participate in this (Devicienti and Poggi, 2011; Raghfar, 2005; Rodgers, Gore, & Figueiredo, 1995). The main focus of social exclusion is on communication issues, including weak social relationships or the absence of these social relationships with family, friends, and the society as a whole of which the individual is a part, and whether or not his/her participation is sufficient. It also refers to problems such as powerlessness and complete non-existence (Devicienti and Poggi, 2011). Feeling old can greatly affect the quality of life and social functioning of the elderly. Therefore, a person's perception of aging is considered an influential factor in successfully passing through a period of old age. The influential factors related to the feeling of aging differ in different societies or according to the culture of each society (Shafaian, Turkmandi, Arab and Arab, 2018). Psychologists consider aging as a time of decline, during which the elderly struggle with a series of physical limitations and social deprivations that they must deal with in any case and continue their lives. This period causes a decrease in ability, strength, and health, and on the other hand, people lose part of their income due to retirement, and over time, their relationships with their families, especially their spouses, friends, and acquaintances, undergo a series of changes. Along with these changes, their social status declines, which is a necessity of this period. They feel ashamed and so-called useless during this period. Understanding aging is one of the effective and influential factors in assessing the level of satisfaction of each person with their aging period, which affects the individual's adaptation to the changes resulting from aging (Sargent -Cox, Anstey, & Luszcz, 2014). Harris, & Dollinger (2003) found a positive correlation was noted between neuroticism and general anxiety regarding the aging process. Worry regarding aging was negatively correlated with agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion, while it showed no relationship with openness to experience. Moreover, the Big Five Personality traits showed varying associations with the four aspects of anxiety related to aging (concerns about changes in physical appearance, fear of older individuals, psychological issues, and anxiety regarding age-related losses). Bedaso & Han (2021) revealed that after controlling for demographic information, the link between agreeableness and depression in older adults was partially influenced by their attitude toward aging. Similarly, the attitude toward physical changes from aging and psychological growth subscales together mediated the relationship between neuroticism and depression. Nonetheless, a notable direct connection between neuroticism and depression remained evident. Conversely, openness did not exhibit a significant direct link to depression except for an indirect one through psychosocial loss.

Social isolation is an example of a social harm that, according to psychologists and sociologists, is caused by factors such as poor health, lack of support in society, negative self-viewing of oneself and one's characteristics, lack of employment, and lack of independence. Social isolation reduces social interactions in an individual, and the individual, due to the mental image he has of the conditions around him, cuts off contact with his surroundings and chooses an individual life, loneliness, and isolation (Seifzadeh, Haqiqitani, and Mohajerani, 2018). It seems that social isolation, in addition to affecting the mental health of individuals, can also cause fear of death. Rajabi, Kazemi, and Esmaili (2016) showed that there is a significant and positive relationship between the schemas of emotional deprivation, distrust/mistreatment, social isolation/alienation, deficiency/shame, failure, obedience and self-control and insufficient self-discipline in active elderly people and the schemas of emotional deprivation, abandonment/instability, distrust/mistreatment, social isolation/alienation, deficiency/shame, failure, and entitlement/grandiosity in

inactive elderly people in the perception of rejection. Also, the three schemas of failure, emotional deprivation, and emotional inhibition have the ability to predict the perception of rejection in active elderly people, and the schema of vulnerability to loss and emotional inhibition predict the perception of rejection in inactive elderly people. Predictive schemas in active elderly people have an interpersonal aspect, and predictive schemas in inactive elderly people have an intrapersonal aspect. Jozi, Ramezanpoor, & Bagean Koulemarz (2023) found that the dark triad of personality traits has a positive and significant relationship with sensitivity to rejection. Buecker et al. (2020) showed that extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness had a negative relationship with loneliness. Neuroticism had a positive relationship with loneliness. Mund & Neyer (2018) found loneliness to predict levels of all big five traits except openness five years later. The effects of loneliness on the development of neuroticism and extraversion reached statistical significance but were only marginal in effect size. In addition, we found that self-regulatory focus aimed at preventing negative events mediated the effects of loneliness on later levels of the big five. Some studies have shown that all personality traits except openness remained statistically significantly associated with loneliness when controlling for other personality traits. In a study Arshadi, Piriaei, and Zare (2012) showed that the perception of rejection in the workplace has a positive relationship with organizational and interpersonal deviant behaviors. The findings also indicated the moderating role of two personality traits, extraversion and neuroticism, in these relationships. Elahi, Bamdadi Sibani, & Shirmohammadi (2020) identified extroverts have shown lower feelings of loneliness and higher perceptions of social support. The findings from regression analysis in introverts showed that the support from friends and family are important predictors of social and familial loneliness, respectively. The identical analysis in extroverts indicated that perceived social support from significant individuals, friends, and family are key predictors of emotional, social, and family loneliness, respectively. The present study attempts to explore the role of personality traits in prediction of the perceived rejection, age feeling, and social isolation in retirees.

## **Research Method**

**The research method is descriptive-correlational, a type of predictive study.**

### **Sample and Sampling Method**

The statistical population of this study consists of all retired people in Zahedan city. The research sample consists of 123 retired people in Zahedan city who were selected through the convenience sampling method and participated in the research. To conduct the present study, the following procedure was followed: After identifying the retired people, they were discussed about the research topic and it was explained that their participation in this study would be used to conduct psychological research and that their information and personal details would be kept completely confidential. After ensuring their understanding, the questionnaires were provided to them in order and they were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaires. In this study, retired people who had the physical and cognitive ability to complete the questionnaires were used, and if some questions were unclear to them, the necessary explanations were provided.

### **Tools Used**

#### **NEO Personality Inventory (Short Form) or PI-R NEO Questionnaire**

This questionnaire was developed by McCrae and Costa (1985). This questionnaire includes five personality dimensions: extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and agreeableness. A 6-year study of the neuroticism, extraversion, and eagerness to experience scales showed reliability coefficients of 0.68 to 0.83 in self-reports and in couple reports. The reliability coefficients of the two factors of agreeableness and conscientiousness were 0.79 and 0.63, respectively, at a two-year interval (Grossi-Farshi, 2001). In the standardization of the NEO test, which was conducted by Grossi-

Farshi (2001) on a sample of 2000 students from Shiraz and Tabriz universities and the universities of medical sciences in these two cities, the correlation coefficient of the five main dimensions was reported to be between 0.56 and 0.87. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each of the main factors of neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness were reported to be 0.86, 0.73, 0.56, 0.68, and 0.87, respectively. To examine the content validity of this test, the correlation between the two self-report forms (S) and the observer assessment form (R) was used, with the maximum correlation being 0.66 in the extraversion factor and the minimum being 0.45 in the agreeableness factor (Grossi-Farshi, 2001). Its reliability in the present study using the Cronbach's alpha method was 0.713.

### **Perceived Rejection Scale**

This scale was developed by Leary and McDonald (2005) and it has 4 sections that assess the perception of rejection (Penhaligon, Louis, & Restubog, 2009). The items of this questionnaire are as follows: For example, the person says, "I feel like I am not a useful person," "I feel like no one likes me," and in general, this scale gives a general picture of the person's subjective experiences by asking them to choose their desired answer from never (1 point) to most of the time (7 points). The reliability coefficient of the scale in an external study, alpha, was found to be 0.85 (Penhaligon, Louis, & Restubog, 2009). The reliability of this questionnaire in the present study using Cronbach's alpha method was 0.898.

### **Aging Appreciation Questionnaire (APQ)**

This questionnaire was designed by Buecker et al. (2007) in such a way that the individual provides a general report of how he or she experiences the aging process and the individual must choose his or her opinion about each statement from 5 points, from completely agree with 5 points to completely disagree with 1 point. This questionnaire consists of two parts, in which the first part contains 32 questions related to seven components: rapid or gradual time course, periodic time course, emotional manifestations, positive and negative control, and positive and negative consequences. The second part includes 17 questions related to changes in physical health status during aging. This questionnaire has been standardized in Iran and the convergent validity rate indicated a correlation ( $r=0.17$ ) between the Persian version of the APQ and CASP-19 questionnaires. The reliability of this questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the dimensions and the entire questionnaire ranged from 0.64 to 0.81. The reliability coefficient of the test – retest (intra-cluster correlation index test) was reported to be between 0.96 and 0.65 at a two-week interval (Miremadi et al., 2018). The Cronbach's alpha in the present study was 0.769.

### **Lubben Elderly Social Isolation Questionnaire**

This questionnaire was first developed by Lubben (1988). This questionnaire is a suitable criterion for assessing the type, degree of closeness, and frequency of social networks in the elderly and elderly relatives. The aforementioned questionnaire assesses and measures the level of social isolation in the elderly and includes 12 questions with a 5-point response. A high score from this questionnaire indicates low isolation in the elderly person, and a score of less than 20 is considered a warning sign for isolation. In a study conducted in Iran, the reliability of this questionnaire using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient method was reported to be 0.896 (Tavakoli Ghouchani et al., 2020). In the present study, the reliability of this questionnaire using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient method was 0.86.

## **Results**

To analyze the data obtained from this study, descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation, as well as inferential statistics such as Pearson's correlation coefficient, stepwise multiple regression analysis, and simple linear regression were used.



**Table 1- Mean and standard deviation of research variables.**

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Neuroticism	123	24.02	9.55
Extroversion	123	25.31	10.2
Openness to experience	123	21.30	5.99
Agreeableness	123	26.78	9.18
Conscientiousness	123	30.68	12.18
Cognitive health	123	23.62	4.00
Perceived rejection	123	8.77	7.37
Age feeling	123	115.71	16.04
Social exclusion	123	24.54	11.36

As the results of Table 1 show, the mean and standard deviation for the neuroticism component were 24.02 and 9.55, for the extraversion component 25.31 and 10.32, for the openness to experience component 21.30 and 5.99, for the agreeableness component 26.87 and 9.18, for the conscientiousness component 30.68 and 12.18, for the cognitive health variable 23.62 and 4.00, for the perceived rejection variable 8.77 and 7.37, for the feeling of aging variable 115.71 and 16.04, and finally for the social isolation variable 24.54 and 11.36.

**Table 2- Results of the correlation coefficient of perceived rejection with personality traits (n=123).**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Perceived rejection	1					
2. Neuroticism	.493**	1				
3. Extroversion	-.436**	-.499**	1			
4. Openness to experience	-.024	-.257**	.246**	1		
5. Agreeableness	-.253**	-.327**	.588**	.181*	1	
6. Conscientiousness	-.341**	-.582**	.396**	.382**	.362**	1

\*\*p<.01, \*p<.05

The results of Pearson's correlation coefficient show that the perception of rejection had a positive and significant correlation with neuroticism ( $r=.493$ ,  $p<.05$ ). This means that with increasing rejection scores, the scores of the neuroticism component increase and vice versa. The perception of rejection had a negative and significant correlation with extraversion ( $r=-.436$ ,  $p<.01$ ), agreeableness ( $r=-.253$ ,  $p<.01$ ), and conscientiousness ( $r=-.341$ ,  $p<.01$ ). This means that with increasing rejection scores, the scores of these components decrease and vice versa. However, there was no significant correlation between the perception of rejection and openness to experience ( $r=-.024$ ,  $p>.05$ ).

To predict the perception of rejection based on personality traits, a stepwise multiple regression test was used, the results of which are shown in the tables below.

**Table 3- the results of multiple regression of perceived rejection from personality traits.**

Variable	Step	Criterion	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F	Sig.
Perceived rejection	First	Neuroticism	.496	.248	.241	38.52	.0001
	Second	Extroversion	.543	.294	.282	8.20	.001

The results of Table 3 indicate that the F value observed in the first step for the neuroticism component is 38.52 and in the second step for the extraversion component is 8.20, which indicates that the regression model has a good fit. The results of the stepwise multiple regression show that in the first step, the neuroticism trait entered the regression equation and explained 24% of the variance in the perception

of rejection, and in the second step, extraversion entered the regression equation and explained 29% of the variance in the perception of rejection. However, the remaining personality traits did not meet the necessary conditions to enter the regression equation and were removed from the equation.

**Table 4- Coefficients from stepwise regression analysis to measure the effect of personality traits on the perceived rejection.**

Variable	Step	Criterion	B	SE	Beta	T	Sig.
Perceived rejection	First	Neuroticism	.384	.061	.497	6.256	.0001
	Second	Neuroticism	.288	.069	.373	4.182	.0001
		Extroversion	-.179	.064	.25	-2.98	.006

The results of Table 4-10 show that the component of perceived rejection had a positive and significant relationship with neuroticism (Beta=0.373, p=.0001) and was a positive and significant predictor for it. Also, perceived rejection had a negative and significant relationship with (Beta=-0.179, p=.006) extraversion.

**Table 5: Results of the correlation coefficient of the age feeling with personality traits (n=123)**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age feeling	1					
2. neuroticism	.268**	1				
3. extroversion	-.255**	-.499**	1			
4. openness to experience	-.045	-.257**	.246**	1		
5. agreeableness	-.127	-.327**	.588**	.181*	1	
6. Conscientiousness	-.162	-.582**	.396**	.382**	.362**	1

\*\*p<.01, \*p<.05

The results of Pearson's correlation coefficient show that feeling old had a positive and significant correlation with neuroticism ( $r=.268$ ,  $p<.01$ ). This means that with increasing scores of feeling old, scores of the neuroticism component increase and vice versa. Feeling old had a negative and significant correlation with the extraversion component ( $r=-.255$ ,  $p<.01$ ). This means that with increasing scores of feeling old, scores of extraversion decrease and vice versa. However, feeling old had no significant correlation with openness to experience ( $r=.045$ ,  $p>.05$ ), agreeableness ( $r=-.127$ ,  $p>.05$ ) and conscientiousness ( $r=-.162$ ,  $p>.05$ ).

To predict the perception of aging based on personality traits, a stepwise multiple regression test was used, the results of which are shown in the table below.

**Table 6- the results of multiple regression of age feeling from personality traits.**

Variable	Step	Criterion	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F	Sig.
Age feeling	First	Extroversion	.275	.075	.68	9.71	.002

The results of table 6 indicate that the F value observed in the first step for the neuroticism component is 9.71, which indicates that the regression model has a good fit. The results of the stepwise multiple regression show that in the first step, the neuroticism trait entered the regression equation and explained 7.5% of the variance for feeling old. However, the remaining personality traits did not meet the necessary conditions to enter the regression equation and were removed from the equation.

**Table 7- Coefficients from stepwise regression analysis to measure the effect of personality traits on the age feeling.**

Variable	Step	Criterion	B	SE	Beta	T	Sig.
Age feeling	First	Extroversion	.451	.145	.275	3.116	.002

The results of Table 7 show that there was a positive and significant relationship between feeling old and neuroticism (Beta=0.275, p=0.002) and it was a positive and significant predictor for it.

**Table 8- Results of the correlation coefficient of social isolation with personality traits (n=123).**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. social exclusion	1					
2. neuroticism	-.272**	1				
3. extroversion	.383**	-.499**	1			
4. openness to experience	.056	-.257**	.246**	1		
5. agreeableness	.287**	-.327**	.588**	.181*	1	
6. conscientiousness	.199*	-.582**	.396**	.382**	.362**	1

\*\*p<.01, \*p<.05

The results of Pearson's correlation coefficient show that social isolation had a negative and significant correlation with neuroticism ( $r=-.272$ ,  $p<.01$ ). This means that with increasing social isolation scores, the scores of the neuroticism component decrease and vice versa. Social isolation had a positive and significant correlation with the personality traits of extraversion ( $r=.383$ ,  $p<.01$ ), agreeableness ( $r=.287$ ,  $p<.01$ ), and conscientiousness ( $r=.199$ ,  $p<.01$ ). This means that with increasing social isolation scores, the scores of these components increase and vice versa. However, social isolation had no significant correlation with the personality trait of openness to experience ( $r=0.056$ ,  $p>.05$ ).

To predict social isolation based on personality traits, a stepwise multiple regression test was used, the results of which are shown in the tables below.

**Table 9- the results of multiple regression of social exclusion from personality traits.**

Variable	Step	Criterion	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F	Sig.
Social exclusion	First	Extroversion	.383	.147	.139	11.159	.0001

The results of Table 9 indicate that the F value observed in the first step for the extraversion component is 11.159, which indicates that the regression model has a good fit. The results of the stepwise multiple regression show that in the first step, the extraversion component entered the regression equation and explained 14.7% of the variance for social isolation. However, other personality components did not meet the necessary conditions to enter the regression equation and were removed from the equation.

**Table 10- Coefficients from stepwise regression analysis to measure the effect of personality traits on the social exclusion.**

Variable	Step	Criterion	B	SE	Beta	T	Sig.
Social exclusion	First	Extroversion	.242	.094	.383	4.522	.0001

The results of Table 10 show that the social isolation component had a positive and significant relationship with extraversion (Beta=0.383, p=.0001) and was a positive and significant predictor for it.

## Discussion

The results of the study showed that the perception of rejection had a positive and significant correlation with neuroticism. The perception of rejection had a negative and significant correlation with extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. However, there was no significant correlation between the perception of rejection and openness to experience, and among the proposed components, the neuroticism and extraversion component had the ability to explain and predict the variable of the perception of

rejection. The results of the present study are in line with some of the results of Arshad, Pirai, and Zare (2012), Buecker, Maes, Denissen, & Luhmann (2020), and Mund, & Neyer (2018). In explaining the obtained results of the study, it can be claimed that the neurotic dimension is one of the fundamental personality traits, and neurotic retirees are known for symptoms such as fear, anxiety, bad temper, jealousy, despair, hopelessness, and loneliness. Their reaction to stressors is weak, and they are more likely to misinterpret normal situations as threatening and interpret small failures as failure and hopelessness, which can increase their perception of rejection. However, the opposite is true for the extraversion component. Retirees who have scored higher on the extraversion dimension are happy and have social relationships, and they gain the necessary energy by connecting with others. These individuals tend to be outgoing, talkative, and have high-energy behaviors, which reduces their perception of rejection. The personality components of neuroticism and extraversion are among the personality components that play a significant role in predicting the perception of rejection. The neuroticism component has a negative role and the extraversion component has a positive role.

The results showed that feeling old had a positive and significant correlation with neuroticism. Feeling old had a negative and significant correlation with extraversion. However, feeling old had no significant correlation with openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, and among the components discussed, only the neurotic trait was able to explain and predict feeling old. The results of the present study were consistent with some of the findings of Harris and Dollinger (2003); and Bedaso & Han (2021). The higher the level of neuroticism of retirees, the higher the feeling of old. However, the other personality dimensions do not play a significant role in feeling old. In explaining the second hypothesis of the study, it can be claimed that retirees whose scores on the neuroticism component were higher had higher levels of anxiety, fear, bad mood, worry, jealousy, despair, and feelings of loneliness, and this could increase their scores on the perception of rejection, and neuroticism is one of the personality components that has a negative role in predicting feeling old.

The results of the study showed that social isolation had a negative and significant correlation with neuroticism. Social isolation had a positive and significant correlation with the personality traits of extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. However, social isolation had no significant correlation with the personality trait of openness to experience. The extraversion component was able to explain and predict social isolation. The results of the present study are consistent with some of the findings of Elahi, Bamdadi Sibani, & Shirmohammadi (2020); Erbas (2018), and Weir (2012). According to the results of this study, it was proven that neuroticism has an inverse relationship with social isolation and has a positive and significant correlation with the personality traits of extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, and only the personality dimension of extraversion was able to predict social isolation positively and significantly. Contrary to the results of most previous studies, the results of this study indicated that social isolation has a positive relationship with the positive subscales of personality traits. In proving this result, it can be claimed that since this research was conducted among retirees in Zahedan city, they have different cultural, social, and economic backgrounds than other retirees in Iran and other countries, and further research is needed to determine the reasons for these results.

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