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# HOW DO PERSONALITY TRAITS AND PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR AFFECT YOUNG ADULTS' COMPLIANCE WITH HEALTH PROTECTION MEASURES AGAINST COVID-19?

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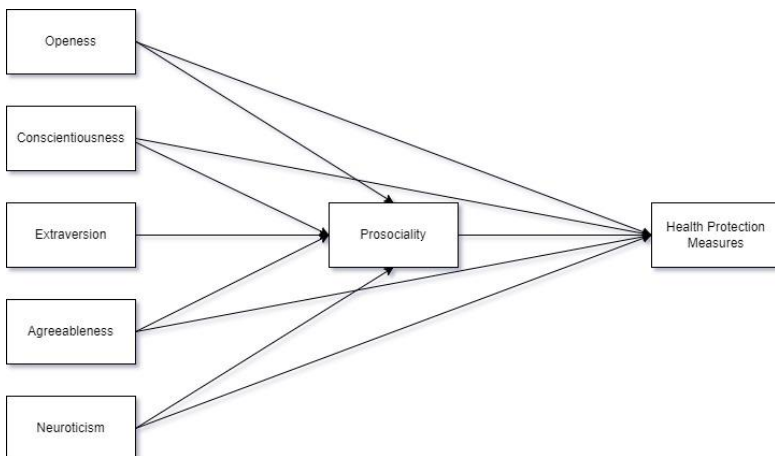
## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the lives of people worldwide. Governments struggled to persuade citizens to obey ongoing lockdowns and social restrictions to fight the transmission of the virus. Social distancing and face masks have become a part of daily life and at the same time a basic tool for protecting ourselves and others around us. Recent studies are focusing on the relationship between personality-prosocial behavior and compliance with health recommendations and measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Personality traits, prosociality and the COVID-19 pandemic is a crucial topic of research during the period of the worldwide health crisis. Many different aspects of personality traits along with a variety of prosociality factors can influence the way people comply with government health recommendations and measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the literature on exploring the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and prosocial behaviour — behaviour of helping others effectively — during COVID-19 as strong predictors of health-protective behaviour against COVID-19. More specifically, we examined whether the personality and prosocial behavior relationship is relevant for the adoption of government health recommendations and measures during a health crisis. Could certain personality characteristics make people better able to cope with the stress and long-term effects of COVID-19? How does prosocial behavior contribute to this extremely challenging task?

The current research was conducted during the second phase of the COVID-19 pandemic (November 2020) using a quantitative approach and an online survey. A 35-item questionnaire was instructed using two types of a five-point Likert scale (1 — strongly disagree and 5 — strongly agree & 1 — never and 5 — very often) to investigate the relationships between the different variables and confirm or reject the hypotheses of the study. The study was undertaken in one of the largest Greek public universities in terms of student numbers. The total sample of the survey consisted of  $N = 239$  respondents, from a business class of 556 students. In this study, we examined the direct effect of personality traits on compliance with health recommendations and prosociality, as well as the indirect effect of personality traits via prosociality on compliance with health recommendations. We analyzed the data using the statistical program Jamovi 3rd generation. The path model (Figure 1) illustrates the relationships among variables. There are five independent variables in the path model (conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness, extroversion, and agreeableness) and one mediator (prosociality) that affect compliance with health recommendations (dependent variable).

**Figure 1.** Path model diagram



The result of the analysis in our study indicated a positive and statistically significant impact of conscientiousness and agreeableness on young adults' prosociality behavior. This means that young people scoring high in these personality traits — conscientiousness and agreeableness — are more likely to adopt prosocial and responsible behavior, cooperate with others, volunteer, be available to help and be willing to adopt certain health routines as a way of serving the common good during a period of health crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Agreeableness and conscientiousness seem to be personality traits positively associated with prosocial behavior which usually predict prosociality actions (Abdullah et al., 2020; Shiner & Masten, 2002; Tariq & Naqvi, 2020).

Invoking the Big Five taxonomy, the review of the recent literature reveals certain personality traits, especially of young people, that might enhance the development of health protection patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as conscientiousness, neuroticism, and agreeableness (Abdelrahman, 2022; Aschwanden et al., 2021; Zettler et al., 2022). The results of the current study are, indeed, supportive of the literature indicating that two of the Big Five personality traits of young adults, conscientiousness and neuroticism, can be linked with a positive attitude to following health precautions and recommendations and are more likely to comply with health measures (social distancing and other prevention measures) to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. It is interesting to note, that conscientiousness has a positive and direct effect on both prosocial behavior and compliance with health recommendations and measures. Other studies conducted during the COVID-19 have also mentioned that this personality trait has a positive impact on entrepreneurial intention (Tsaknis et al., 2022) and the strongest association with overall students' satisfaction with synchronous online academic learning (SOAL) (Patitsa et al., 2021).

Recent research studies indicate that individuals with prosocial behavior are more likely to follow health recommendations and cooperate when asked to follow strict health measures or other guidelines such as social distancing and wearing face masks (Campos-Mercade et al., 2021; Syropoulos & Markowitz, 2021). However, our study did not reveal any significant direct link between young adults' prosociality and compliance with health recommendations and measures. Additionally, the results show that there is not any indirect effect of young adults' personality traits on health recommendation through the mediation of prosociality. Consequently, whether prosociality can act as a mediator factor in the relationship between personality traits and compliance with health recommendations and measures remains an open question for future research.

This is not to say that people with high prosocial skills are less likely to follow health recommendations (face-masking, social distancing, etc.) but rather to consider that there are other factors that influence

their prosocial decision-making and attitude towards the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic activated mortality-related risk perceptions and social behaviors differently than usual (Syropoulos & Markowitz, 2021) and personality traits and prosocial behavior need to be examined in a different context than before. It is, therefore, important to further investigate the multi-dimensional relationship between prosociality and personal behavior towards the pandemic as well as compliance with health precautions and measures, considering many different factors that might influence these links.

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