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Original Scientific Paper

## PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS OF MEDICAL AND HEALTH SCIENCES

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**Abstract:** *The profession of a medical worker is stated as a humane occupation, which is usually associated with attachment, responsibility, and conscientiousness as desirable personality traits. It is individual differences in personality traits that play a significant role in the choice of occupation, but often also determine work performance. Also, the compatibility between the characteristics of health workers and the demands of their work are crucial for the quality provision of health services. The aim of the work was to look at the distribution of personality traits among students of medical and health sciences, as well as to look at the relationship between the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and personality traits. In the work, we used an empirical-non-experimental method, and among the instruments used were the BIG Five + 2 for the assessment of personality traits and a questionnaire on the social-status characteristics of the respondents. The research sample consisted of 277 students of the Faculty of Medicine in Foča. The obtained results indicate that students achieve the highest scores on the dimension of extraversion (AS=40.80; sd=8.75), openness (AS=38.95; sd=5.55), conscientiousness (AS=37.81; sd=7.12), positive valence (AS=32.08; sd=7.64), and the lowest scores on the traits of negative valence (AS=15.70; sd=5.62), neuroticism (AS=22.53; sd=7.89) and aggressiveness (AS=25.35; sd=8.75). Contemporary research in the medical profession indicates that the quality of health services is shaped by a number of factors, and that along with the technical and professional aspect of the profession, psychological dimensions have a formative role in providing complete and humanized care for patients. In the context of improving health care, it is necessary to carry out continuous research, which also includes careful planning of human resources as a key factor in the success of any organization.*

**Key words:** *personality traits, healthcare workers, students of medical and health sciences*

### Introduction

The relationship between medical staff and patients is a complex process, in which, among other things, the individual needs of the patient are assessed. Healthcare professionals have different responsibilities and scopes of work, carried out according to their education and job positions, but what is expected in every role is a professional approach to work, the patient, students, colleagues, and collaborators from related fields—which naturally requires certain personality traits. Medical workers, whether doctors or nurses, belong to a helping profession that must—and should—develop

certain behaviors and personality characteristics such as empathy, consistency, honesty, conscientiousness, respect for others, and the like. Indeed, individual differences in personality traits play a significant role in career choice, but are often also a key success factor for any organization.

Throughout the history of psychology, various approaches have emerged in an attempt to explain personality, including psychoanalytic, cognitive, humanistic, behavioral, and others. Although there is no comprehensive definition of personality, it can be described as the dynamic organization of psychological systems within an individual that determines their characteristic behavior and thinking. Personality traits/dimensions are explained as characteristics that describe the ways in which people differ from one another, but also the ways in which they are similar [1]. The literature indicates that a key factor for success in a professional career is the alignment between personality traits and the characteristics of the chosen profession [2]. For this reason, personality traits have attracted increasing research interest across various professional fields, including the medical sector. Some studies in this area have shown that the choice of a particular medical specialty correlates with gender, academic challenges, expected income, lifestyle, and, most importantly, the personality traits of physicians [3-5]. However, it was only the theorists of personality traits who managed to identify five factors that explain a large portion of the variability in human thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This personality model is known as the Big Five. Psycholexical research conducted in our linguistic area has shown that, in addition to the five core dimensions, two additional ones can be included. As a result, the model commonly referred to in our region is the Big Five plus Two (BF+2) model [6]. The first dimension of this model is Extraversion, which implies an open and energetic approach to life and includes traits such as talkativeness, sociability and assertiveness. The opposite pole of this dimension is described as quiet, reserved, shy and withdrawn. The second dimension is Agreeableness, which refers to prosocial behavior as opposed to antagonistic behavior, and includes traits such as altruism, trust and modesty. Individuals with a high level of this dimension (Agreeableness) are caring toward others, provide support and comfort, and are cooperative. On the opposite end of this dimension are traits such as unkindness and emotional coldness, which is why this dimension is often also referred to by the name of its opposite pole—Aggressiveness. Conscientiousness is the third dimension of the model, referring to socially conditioned impulse control, i.e., behaviors such as acting thoughtfully, adhering to norms and rules, being organized, precise, and responsible. The fourth dimension is Emotional Stability, whose opposite pole is Neuroticism. Individuals high in neuroticism (i.e., low in emotional stability) are described as nervous, anxious, tense, or sad. Openness to Experience is the fifth dimension, which includes traits such as creativity, imagination, originality, artistic tendencies, and openness to new experiences. The opposite end of this dimension is characterized by rigidity and narrow interests. The sixth dimension, Positive Valence, refers to a positive self-image, but also to narcissistic tendencies, while Negative Valence, as the seventh personality dimension, predominantly reflects a tendency toward manipulative behavior and a negative self-image.

Many studies have explored this topic in an attempt to determine whether there is a specific personality pattern that influences the choice of a medical profession. In line with that, this study was dedicated to analyzing the personality traits of students in medical and health sciences.

### **Materials and Methods**

*The aim of this study* is to examine the distribution of personality traits among students of medical and health sciences, as well as to explore the relationships between the participants' socio-demographic characteristics and their personality traits.

*The initial hypothesis* of the study is that the distribution of personality traits among students of medical and health sciences significantly deviates from a normal distribution, and that the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants represent statistically significant determinants of personality traits.

*Research Methods.* In this study, we used the method of theoretical analysis and an empirical non-experimental method. The method of theoretical analysis was applied in developing the theoretical foundation of the research, as well as in reviewing and analyzing the content of previous studies that are substantively and methodologically related to this research. We used the survey method for a typical field study on a selected sample, employing instruments specifically chosen for the purposes of this research. This method allows for the quick and straightforward collection of relevant data, as well as the application of various statistical procedures necessary for drawing reliable results and conclusions.

*The research sample* consisted of 277 students from the Faculty of Medicine in Foča, of which 212 (76.5%) were female and 65 (23.5%) were male. The participants were between 18 and 23 years old, with an average age of  $M = 19.91$  and a standard deviation of  $SD = 0.916$ .

*The battery of measurement instruments*, in accordance with the methodological design of the study, included: a questionnaire on the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants, and the BF+2 Questionnaire [6].

- The Questionnaire on Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the participants was constructed by the researcher specifically for the purposes of this study. It provides information on personal and socio-demographic traits of the participants that are relevant to the research.
- The BF+2 Questionnaire is designed to assess seven personality dimensions identified in a psycholexical study in the Serbian language: Extraversion, Neuroticism, Conscientiousness, Aggressiveness, Openness, Positive Valence, and Negative Valence. This version contains 70 items (ten for each dimension), and participants indicate their responses by circling one of the numbers on a 5-point Likert-type scale, thereby expressing the degree of agreement with a given statement—from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5).

*Data processing* was carried out using the SPSS software package, version 22. Since the distribution of variables significantly deviated from a normal distribution, non-

parametric statistical procedures were applied. For the analysis of the collected data, we used descriptive statistical measures, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, the Mann-Whitney test, and the Kruskal-Wallis test.

*Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research.* The limitation of this study lies in the fact that it considered only the personality dimensions included in the Big Five Plus Two questionnaire. Future research should include a broader range of personality traits and characteristics, as well as a greater number of factors that may influence professional orientation, in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

## Results and Discussion

The application of the Big Five model among medical and healthcare students is significant because it provides insight into the personality traits of future healthcare professionals. This allows for a better understanding of their behavior, motivations, and interactions with their environment. Additionally, the Big Five model can serve as a useful tool for recruitment, selection, and personnel management in healthcare settings. Furthermore, understanding the personality traits of healthcare workers can help identify candidates with the greatest potential for specific roles within the healthcare team. Moreover, adapting work environments and management strategies in line with personality traits can increase engagement, job satisfaction, and long-term staff retention [3, 4].

The results obtained, presented in Table 1, indicate that students scored highest on the dimensions of Extraversion ( $M = 40.80$ ;  $SD = 8.75$ ), Openness ( $M = 38.95$ ;  $SD = 5.55$ ), Conscientiousness ( $M = 37.81$ ;  $SD = 7.12$ ), and Positive Valence ( $M = 32.08$ ;  $SD = 7.64$ ), while the lowest scores were observed for Negative Valence ( $M = 15.70$ ;  $SD = 5.62$ ), Neuroticism ( $M = 22.53$ ;  $SD = 7.89$ ), and Aggressiveness ( $M = 25.35$ ;  $SD = 8.75$ ). An overview of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results shows that the distributions of the BF+2 personality traits in our sample do not follow a normal distribution (Table 1).

Table 1. Statistical indicators of the distribution of examined personality dimensions VP+2

	AS	SD	Mdn	Sk	SE Sk	Ku	SE Ku	Kolmogorov-Smirnov test		
								K-S	df	p
Aggressiveness	25,35	8,75	25,00	0,365	0,146	-0,463	0,292	0,072	277	0,002
Extraversion	40,80	5,89	42,00	-0,741	0,146	0,407	0,292	0,091	277	0,000
Neuroticism	22,53	7,87	22,00	0,629	0,146	-0,085	0,292	0,079	277	0,000
Negative Valence	15,70	5,62	14,00	1,798	0,146	4,711	0,292	0,160	277	0,000
Openness	38,95	5,55	39,00	-0,282	0,146	-0,045	0,292	0,060	277	0,015
Positive Valence	32,08	7,64	32,00	0,183	0,146	-0,251	0,292	0,076	277	0,001
Conscientiousness	37,81	7,12	38,00	-0,386	0,146	-0,044	0,292	0,069	277	0,000

Previous research has shown that personality traits influence the perception of the work environment and the way individuals cope with job demands. Extraversion is defined as the degree of engagement with the external world and includes traits such as sociability or, on the opposite end, introversion and solitude. Extraversion acts as a protective factor against burnout and has been shown to have a positive and significant impact on service performance in Turkey [7] and Taiwan [8]. Furthermore, extraversion involves vitality and energy that can be invested in life goals [9]. A high score on the extraversion scale reflects assertiveness, and numerous studies have shown a positive correlation between extraversion and academic success. When it comes to future healthcare professionals, the finding that the highest score among our participants was on the extraversion scale supports the desirable characteristics for this profession, such as warmth, agreeableness, sociability, and a tendency to experience positive emotions [10]. Students also scored highly on the dimension of openness, which represents a mix of personality functioning components including intellect, imagination, certain aspects of culture, and non-conformism. This supports a pronounced intellectual openness and reduced rigidity, which is particularly important for the medical profession. We can be satisfied with this result, which indicates that students in our sample are inclined to accept new ideas and novel problem-solving approaches, rather than being narrowly focused in their interests. Moreover, openness as a personality dimension is often associated with crystallized intelligence and has been linked to academic and educational achievement [11]. Healthcare professionals with a high level of openness are more likely to demonstrate flexibility in recognizing patients' needs and responding to their demands, as well as creativity in solving patient-related problems [12]. Openness to experience has a positive and significant effect on organizational services, as confirmed by research conducted in several countries, including Turkey [7], Korea [13] and Malaysia [12]. Conscientiousness is also a dimension on which our participants scored highly, indicating that future healthcare professionals exhibit characteristics of perfectionism and careful decision-making. Research shows that conscientiousness positively influences the quality of healthcare services. It is a reliable [14], valid predictor [15] and one of the most powerful indicators of service performance [16, 17]. Conscientiousness has been shown to positively and significantly affect the quality of nursing work in both Seoul [13] and Malaysia [12]. The Positive Valence dimension also shows a high score in our sample. Individuals who score high on this dimension tend to describe themselves as winners, as people with special qualities. They perceive themselves as influential, powerful, important, destined for great achievements [10]. Looking at the results in Table 1, we observe that students of medical and health sciences scored the lowest on the Negative Valence dimension, which indicates that our participants are not prone to manipulative behavior or negative self-assessment. Neuroticism is another dimension where the average score is lower than theoretically expected, which is particularly important since individuals with high levels of neuroticism are less inclined to set goals and persist in achieving them. On the other hand, high neuroticism is a known predictor of depression in student populations [18]. Aggressiveness is a dimension where participants from our sample scored around the theoretical average. In the Big Five Plus Two model, the Aggressiveness dimension includes a large number of items related to anger, a difficult temperament, and

stubbornness. The obtained results suggest that these characteristics are not strongly expressed in our participants. Table 2 presents the results of the VP+2 personality dimensions with regard to gender. The Mann-Whitney test results showed that male and female students do not differ statistically significantly on most dimensions, and that a statistically significant difference was found only in two dimensions: Negative Valence ( $p = 0.013$ ) and Positive Valence ( $p = 0.031$ ). Research on gender differences in personality traits has yielded inconsistent findings. A study conducted by Čolović and colleagues, aimed at validating the questionnaire, showed that females tend to score higher on the dimensions of Neuroticism, Positive Valence, and Conscientiousness, while males scored higher on Negative Valence [6]. However, a comprehensive study conducted in our region in 2010 concluded that even where gender differences exist, they are only weakly expressed [19].

Table 2. Gender differences on the dimensions of the VP+2 Questionnaire

	Gender	N	Mdn	Mann-Whitney test	z	p																																																								
Extraversion	male	65	42,00	6484,000	-0,720	0,472																																																								
	female	212	42,00				Aggressiveness	male	65	25,00	6313,500	-1,021	0,307	female	212	24,00	Neuroticism	male	65	21,00	6641,000	-0,440	0,660	female	212	22,00	Negative Valence	male	65	15,00	5497,000	-2,476	<b>0,013</b>	female	212	14,00	Openness	male	65	41,00	6015,000	-1,551	0,121	female	212	39,00	Positive Valence	male	65	34,00	5670,500	-2,161	<b>0,031</b>	female	212	31,00	Conscientiousness	male	65	39,00	6764,000	-0,223
Aggressiveness	male	65	25,00	6313,500	-1,021	0,307																																																								
	female	212	24,00				Neuroticism	male	65	21,00	6641,000	-0,440	0,660	female	212	22,00	Negative Valence	male	65	15,00	5497,000	-2,476	<b>0,013</b>	female	212	14,00	Openness	male	65	41,00	6015,000	-1,551	0,121	female	212	39,00	Positive Valence	male	65	34,00	5670,500	-2,161	<b>0,031</b>	female	212	31,00	Conscientiousness	male	65	39,00	6764,000	-0,223	0,823	female	212	38,00						
Neuroticism	male	65	21,00	6641,000	-0,440	0,660																																																								
	female	212	22,00				Negative Valence	male	65	15,00	5497,000	-2,476	<b>0,013</b>	female	212	14,00	Openness	male	65	41,00	6015,000	-1,551	0,121	female	212	39,00	Positive Valence	male	65	34,00	5670,500	-2,161	<b>0,031</b>	female	212	31,00	Conscientiousness	male	65	39,00	6764,000	-0,223	0,823	female	212	38,00																
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Using Spearman's correlation coefficient, we examined the relationship between the chronological age of participants and the personality dimensions. The obtained results are presented in Table 3. The results show a statistically significant correlation between the participants' age and Extraversion ( $\rho = 0.132$ ,  $p = 0.028$ ), Neuroticism ( $\rho = -0.153$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ), and Negative Valence ( $\rho = 0.129$ ,  $p = 0.031$ ). As seen in Table 3, Extraversion is statistically significantly correlated with age at the 0.05 level. According to Cohen's criterion, this correlation is of low intensity and positive in direction, suggesting that older participants tend to have higher scores on this dimension. One possible explanation for this finding is that older students have already achieved an initial level of adaptation to academic responsibilities, making them more socially active and more inclined toward continuous stimulation, unlike younger students who are typically more reserved and calm. The relationship between Neuroticism and chronological age is also statistically significant at the 0.05 level, of low intensity and negative direction. The result indicates that as students' age increases, their level of neuroticism tends to decrease. Since neuroticism refers to the

extent to which individuals experience psychological stress—often associated with feelings of insecurity—this finding is quite logical. It is reasonable to expect that younger students, who are just beginning their academic journey, are more prone to such psychological responses [20]. The Negative Valence dimension is also statistically significantly correlated with students' chronological age at the 0.05 significance level. This correlation is of low intensity and negative direction, indicating that higher scores on this dimension are associated with younger age.

Table 3. Spearman's correlation between respondent age and the VP+2 personality dimensions

	The age of the respondent	
	ro	p
Extraversion	0,132	<b>0,028</b>
Aggressiveness	-0,046	0,444
Neuroticism	-0,153	<b>0,011</b>
Negative Valence	-0,129	<b>0,031</b>
Openness	0,076	0,210
Positive Valence	0,060	0,321
Conscientiousness	0,091	0,131

Table 4 presents the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test, which show, contrary to expectations, that there is no statistically significant difference in the VP+2 personality dimensions based on the academic performance of the participants. However, a review of the existing literature indicates that personality traits are important predictors of academic success in the majority of studies [21-23].

Table 4. Differences in VP+2 with regard to academic success

	Academic success		
	Kruskall Wallis test	df	p
Extraversion	2,541	3	0,468
Aggressiveness	6,282	3	0,099
Neuroticism	7,057	3	0,070
Negative Valence	5,744	3	0,125
Openness	2,148	3	0,542
Positive Valence	1,410	3	0,703
Conscientiousness	6,776	3	0,079

## Conclusion

Considering the extensive knowledge today about the factors influencing the choice of a medical profession, it would be advisable to inform future students about these factors within the framework of professional orientation before making career decisions. Given that personality traits predispose individuals to consistent behavior patterns, taking relevant personality traits into account could facilitate career counseling or even candidate selection processes for certain occupations beyond

purely intellectual qualifications. In other words, future students should be guided toward fields in which they are most likely to succeed based on their own interests, preferences, personality traits, and academic achievements. Therefore, in the context of improving healthcare, it is essential to conduct continuous research that involves careful planning of human resources as a key factor in the success of any organization.

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## OSOBI NE LIČNOSTI STUDENATA MEDICINSKIH I ZDRAVSTVENIH NAUKA

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**Sažetak:** *Profesija medicinskog radnika navodi se kao humano zanimanje, uz koje se uobičajeno vezuju privrženost, odgovornost, savjesnost kao poželjne osobine ličnosti. Upravo individualne razlike u osobinama ličnosti igraju značajnu ulogu u izboru zanimanja, ali često određuju i radnu uspješnost. Takođe, usaglašenost između osobina zdravstvenih radnika i zahtijeva njihovog posla ključni su za kvalitetno pružanje zdravstvenih usluga. Cilj rada bio je sagledati distribuciju osobina ličnosti kod studenata medicinskih i zdravstvenih nauka, kao i sagledati relacije između socio-demografskih karakteristika ispitanika i osobina ličnosti. U radu smo koristili empirijsko-neeksperimentalni metod, a od instrumenata su primijenjeni BIG Five + 2 za procjenu osobina ličnosti i upitnik o socijalno-statusnim karakteristikama ispitanika. Uzorak istraživanja činilo je 277 studenata Medicinskog fakulteta u Foči. Dobijeni rezultati ukazuju da studenti najviše skorove ostvaruju na dimenziji ekstraverzije (AS=40,80; SD=8,75), otvorenosti (AS=38,95; SD=5,55), savjesnosti (AS=37,81; SD=7,12), pozitivne valence (AS=32,08; sd=7,64), a najmanje skorove na osobinama negativne valence (AS=15,70; SD=5,62), neuroticizma (AS=22,53; SD=7,89) i agresivnosti (AS=25,35; SD=8,75). Savremena istraživanja u medicinskoj profesiji ukazuju na to da je kvalitet zdravstvenih usluga oblikovan nizom faktora, te da uz tehnički i stručni aspekt profesije upravo psihološke dimenzije imaju formativnu ulogu u pružanju cjelovite i humanizirane brige za pacijente. U kontekstu unapređenja zdravstvene zaštite neophodno je provoditi kontinuirana istraživanja koja podrazumijevaju i brižljivo planiranje ljudskih resursa kao ključnog faktora uspjeha svake organizacije.*

**Ključne riječi:** *osobine ličnosti, zdravstveni radnici, studenti medicinskih i zdravstvenih nauka*

