

## Character Strengths as Potential Predictors of Shyness and Neuroticism

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### ABSTRACT

*With ever increasing academic demands and lack of attention towards individual differences, shy students struggle really hard. In-depth analysis of literature has already exposed the positive linkage of shyness with personality traits of neuroticism. Positive psychology has always worked towards flourishing an individual by focusing on their strengths instead of weakness. This suggests that by working on character strengths, one can subsequently work on the negative trait of shyness. The current study has been conducted with the aim to test the character strengths (self-regulation and resilience) as predictors of shyness and neuroticism. Also, the mediating role of shyness in linking character strengths with neuroticism has been explored. A sample of 120 students has been taken. Using Pearson correlation, multiple regression and mediation analysis, findings exhibit significant negative correlation between resilience and neuroticism. Resilience was also found to be a significant predictor of neuroticism in college students. Variables of shyness and self-management however had no relationship with any of the variables. Shyness was also not found to be mediating the relationship between character strengths and neuroticism.*

**Keywords:** Shyness, Resilience, Self-management, Neuroticism, Character Strengths

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### INTRODUCTION

There are no two people who are alike. People differ from each other in a multitude of ways. This disparity could be due to a variety of reasons, including personality traits; which represent people's unique patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. One of such traits is shyness. Shyness is defined as a dread or discomfort induced by others, particularly in unfamiliar situations or among strangers. It's a terrible sense of self-consciousness, an apprehension about what other people think of them. It is a personality trait reflecting inhibition or discomfort shown by individuals in interpersonal situations which significantly affect their participation in activities (Henderson & Zimbardo, 2001). Because of the experience of fear, anxiety, and apprehension, shyness has been found to have a significant relationship with neuroticism (Afshan et al, 2015). Neuroticism is a personality trait dimension representing the degree to which a person experiences the world as distressing, threatening, and unsafe. Each person can be found somewhere in this personality dimension between the extremes of

perfect emotional stability and complete emotional chaos. Individuals with high neuroticism are prone to being labile (having rapidly changing emotions), anxious, tense, and withdrawn. People with a low level of neuroticism are more content, confident, and consistent. Shyness was observed to have a significant relationship with introversion and neuroticism scores affecting their social relationships (Kwiatkowska & Rogoza, 2019).

Positive psychology has identified character strengths such as leadership and creativity as a class of individual difference psychological and behavioral mechanisms that promote adaptiveness and well-being (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Park & Peterson 2009). A strength can be defined as a natural ability to behave, think and feel in a way that allows for optimal functioning in the pursuit of valued outcomes. Peterson and Seligman (2004) produced a comprehensive list of qualities and characteristics that were shared by people from all cultural backgrounds. Based on ten criteria, they improved this list of hundreds of strengths that they had thus far acquired. As a

consequence, 24 character strengths were found and categorized into 6 virtues.

Self-management, the first character strength is labeled as self-control, or more broadly as self-regulation (Peterson & Seligman 2004). Self-control, also known as self-management, is described as intentional effortful self-regulation that is used when environmental factors dictate a different course of action than pursuing a goal (Kanfer & Karoly 1972; Mezo 2009). The character strength of self-management is thought to be an expression of the character virtue of temperance (Peterson & Seligman 2004). Eisenberg and Fabes (1992) hypothesized that people low on regulation and other constructive modes of regulation, are likely to be both shy and prone to negative emotions.

The second character strength is Resilience, a character strength displayed in the face of adversity, acting as a buffer or source of protection; providing a unique lens, reframe, or mindset shift; and assisting in the management, overcome, healing, transcendence, and/or recovery from problems. These are the functions of buffering, reappraisal, and resilience, in that order.

Briggs (1988) research concluded that shyness correlates almost equally with measures of introversion and neuroticism, implying that the variable of shyness should be positioned midway between these orthogonal dimensions of introversion and neuroticism. University students' shyness and neuroticism had a positive relationship, moreover, personality traits and emotional intelligence were significant predictors of shyness (Arslan et al., 2017). The existing research shows shyness having a significant negative relationship with self-management.

In terms of resilience, although the literature was limited but presented a mixed review as on the one hand resilience was found to have no relationship with shyness while on the other hand, it had a significant negative correlation with shyness.

The study by Terwase et al. (2014) looked at the connection between resilience, shyness, loneliness, and Internet addiction among undergraduate students. Resilience was observed to be a negative predictor of online addiction, but shyness and loneliness were found to be good predictors of internet addiction. Kravchuk (2021)

researched the relationship between the propensity to forgive and psychological resilience, and the factors influencing psychological resilience. Psychological resilience was observed to have negative relationships with spontaneous aggression, neuroticism, irritability and shyness.

The recent literature showed a significant relationship between character strengths of Resilience and Self-management. In the study by Raquel Artuch-Garde et al. (2017), researchers found that learning from mistakes (self-regulation) was a strong predictor of coping and confidence, tenacity and adaptation, and tolerance to bad conditions (resilience). Similarly, low-medium-high degrees of self-regulation corresponded with scores on resilience components.

Neuroticism is associated with poor mental health (Pauly et al., 2021). Such findings were also obtained by Shalini, Shyama, and Prachi (2021). A study by de la Fuente et al., (2021) revealed that Neuroticism was a negative predictor of proactive resilience, a positive predictor of reactive resilience, and a positive predictor of academic stress elements in the teaching and learning process, as well as stress symptoms.

In sum, the careful observation of literature suggested that shyness has a significant association with the personality trait of neuroticism. In terms of resilience, there was a mixed review, as resilience was shown to have no link with shyness while also having a strong but negative correlation with shyness.

### **Rationale of the Present Study**

With ever increasing academic demands and lack of attention towards individual differences, shy students struggle really hard. Due to their introverted personality, shy students frequently experience particular difficulties in the classroom and in their overall wellbeing, which can lead to feelings of worry and loneliness. Such people could find it challenging to communicate with peers or participate fully in class discussions, which would negatively impact their academic experience. It is essential to recognize and cater to the unique requirements of shy students in order to establish a welcoming and inclusive learning environment that supports their intellectual and emotional growth. One such area

of psychology which caters to such need is positive psychology. Positive psychology has always worked towards flourishing an individual by focusing on their strengths instead of weakness. This suggests that by working on character strengths, one can subsequently work on the negative trait of shyness to not only understand this notion better but also to deal with it effectively. There's a dearth of research on linkage of character strengths with shyness, therefore, the current study aims to test the character strengths (self-regulation and resilience) as predictors of shyness and neuroticism. Also, the mediating role of shyness in linking character strengths with neuroticism has been explored. By doing so, the study wishes to see how the concept of character strength is linked with a negative concept of shyness.

### Objectives of the study

1. To see the relationship between resilience, self-management, shyness and neuroticism.
2. To assess if resilience and self-management predict shyness and neuroticism.
3. To understand the mediating role of shyness on the relationship between character strengths (resilience and self-management) and neuroticism

## METHODOLOGY

### Sample

The sample of 120 participants consisting of college-going young adults (18-26) was selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques for data collection. The sample consisted of both Males (n=34) and Females (n=86) with a mean age of 21.

### Design

The present study employed a correlational research design, followed by a mediation model. The study aimed to determine the relationship between the independent variable of character strength and the dependent variables of neuroticism through the mediating role of shyness.

### Measures

The following measures were used in the study:

a) Shyness Scale: The McCroskey Shyness Scale (McCroskey & Richmond, 1982) was used to

assess shyness. It consisted of 14 items and based on 5-point Likert scale. This measure exhibited a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90 and excellent face validity (McCroskey & Richmond, 1982).

b) Resilience Scale: Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 10-Item Version consists of a 5-point Likert-type cumulative instrument. Cronbach's alpha is .87 and internal validity of the measure ranges between .46-.68.

c) Self-management Scale: Self-Management and Self Control Scale (SMSC) is a 16-item scale devised by Mezo in 2008. Items are rated on a 6-point Likert scale. Internal consistency of the scale is found to be 0.81 and shows high consistency with other standardized scales.

d) Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised - Short Form (EPQR-S) developed by Eysenck et al., (1985) includes 48 items and 4 subscales: Extraversion, Neuroticism, Psychoticism, and Lie. For the present study, only the 12 items of domain neuroticism were taken. Eysenck et al. (1985) reported reliabilities for males and females respectively of 0.84 and 0.80 for neuroticism. Each question has a binary response, 'yes' or 'no'.

### Method of analysis

Analysis was done through correlation and parallel mediation through SPSS. For the analysis correlation was done between the variables of shyness, resilience, self-management and neuroticism. After the correlation, mediation analysis was done using Process Macro Version 4 in SPSS Version 25. Multiple regression was done in which stepwise regression was used.

## RESULTS

**Table 1**

*Summary of Descriptive Statistics (N=120)*

| Variables       | Mean  | SD   |
|-----------------|-------|------|
| Shyness         | 42.0  | 8.28 |
| Resilience      | 24.92 | 6.91 |
| Self-Management | 46.24 | 9.16 |
| Neuroticism     | 7.16  | 3.49 |

Table 1 represents the mean and standard deviation scores of Shyness, Self-management, Neuroticism and Resilience of 120 samples. Shyness has a mean score of 42 (SD 8.28), resilience of 24.92 (SD 6.91), self-management of 46.24 (SD 9.16) and lastly neuroticism with a mean value of 7.16 (SD 3.49).

**Table 2**

*Correlations between Shyness, Self-management, Neuroticism and Resilience (N=120)*

| Variables       | Shyness | Resilience | Self-Management |
|-----------------|---------|------------|-----------------|
| Shyness         |         |            |                 |
| Resilience      | -0.008  |            |                 |
| Self-Management | -0.091  | 0.138      |                 |
| Neuroticism     | 0.161   | -.465**    | -0.103          |

\*\* $p < 0.01$

Table 2 represents the correlation between shyness, self-management, neuroticism and resilience of 120 subjects. Shyness and self-management had no significant relationship with resilience and neuroticism. Resilience showed no significant relationship with shyness and self-management but a significant negative relationship was observed with neuroticism (-0.465) significant at 0.01 level of significance.

**Table 3**

*Summary of regression analysis for predicting neuroticism (N = 120)*

| Variables  | B      | SE B  | $\beta$  |
|------------|--------|-------|----------|
| Step 1     |        |       |          |
| Constant   | 13.021 | 1.065 |          |
| Resilience | -0.235 | 0.041 | -0.465** |

\*\* $p < 0.01$

Table 3 shows the regression analysis for regression predicting neuroticism of 120 samples. Resilience does predict neuroticism at 0.01 level of significance. This implies that with 1 unit increase in the value of resilience there will be a decline of 0.235 (B value) units in the neuroticism scores.

**Table 4**

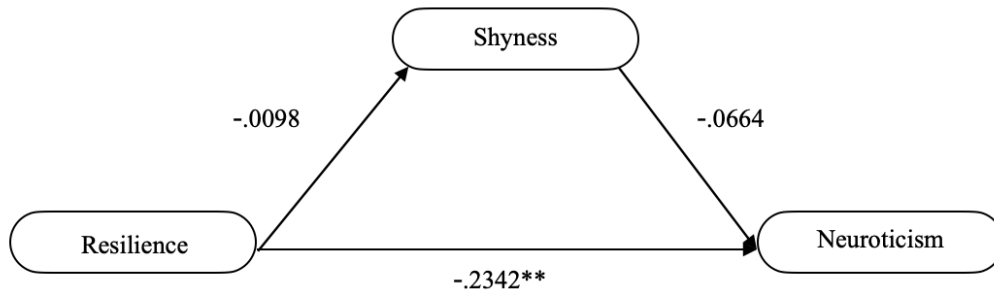
*Mediating role of shyness on the relationship between resilience and neuroticism*

| Description of Model           | Coff.   | SE     | t       | p      | LLCI    | ULCI   |
|--------------------------------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| <b>Direct Effect</b>           |         |        |         |        |         |        |
| Resilience→Shyness             | -0.0098 | 0.1103 | -0.0893 | 0.9290 | -.2283  | 0.2086 |
| <b>Direct Effect</b>           |         |        |         |        |         |        |
| Resilience→Neuroticism         | -.2342  | .0407  | -5.7517 | .0000  | -.3149  | -.1536 |
| Shyness →Neuroticism           | 0.066   | 0.034  | 1.953   | 0.053  | -0.001  | 0.134  |
| <b>Indirect Effect</b>         |         |        |         |        |         |        |
| Resilience→Shyness→Neuroticism | -.0007  | .0082  | -       | -      | -0.0914 | 0.0153 |

Table 4 represents the mediating role of shyness between resilience and neuroticism. There is a direct significant negative relationship between resilience and neuroticism  $-0.2342$  significant at 0.01 level of significance. Shyness did not show any direct relationship with neuroticism. Also, within the indirect effects, the relationship between resilience and neuroticism is not mediated by shyness.

**Figure 1**

*Mediation model of Shyness on the relationship between Resilience and Neuroticism*



**Table 5**

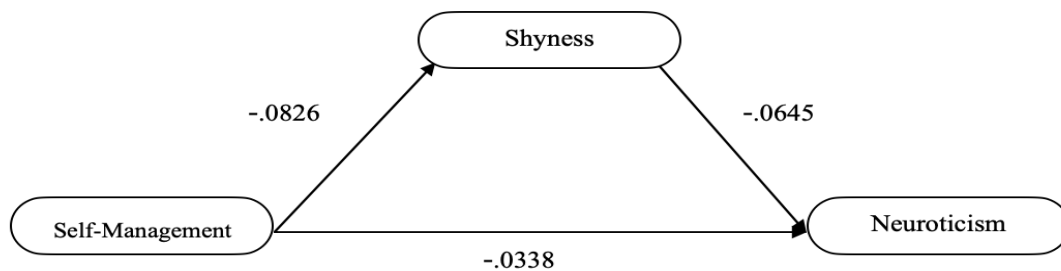
*Mediating role of shyness on the relationship between self management and neuroticism (N=120)*

| Description of Model                | Coff.   | SE     | t       | p      | LLCI    | ULCI   |
|-------------------------------------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|
| <b>Direct Effect</b>                |         |        |         |        |         |        |
| Self-Management→Shyness             | -0.0826 | 0.0828 | -0.9969 | 0.320  | -0.2466 | 0.0814 |
| <b>Direct Effect</b>                |         |        |         |        |         |        |
| Self-Management→Neuroticism         | -0.0338 | 0.0348 | 0.09731 | 0.3325 | -0.1027 | 0.0350 |
| Shyness →Neuroticism                | 0.065   | 0.039  | 1.677   | 0.096  | -0.012  | 0.0141 |
| <b>Indirect Effect</b>              |         |        |         |        |         |        |
| Self-Management→Shyness→Neuroticism | -0.0053 | 0.0071 | -       | -      | -0.0250 | 0.0026 |

Table 5 represents the mediating role of shyness between self-management and neuroticism. Self-management did not show any significant direct effect with either shyness or neuroticism. Shyness too had no significant relationship with self-management or neuroticism. Indirect effects too show that shyness does not mediate the relationship between self-management and neuroticism.

**Figure 2**

*Mediation model of shyness on the relationship between self-management and neuroticism*



## DISCUSSION

The present research aimed to study the relationship between character strengths (resilience and self-regulation) with shyness and neuroticism within college-going students, aged 18-26 years.

The mean scores show that students exhibit moderate levels of shyness, resilience, self-regulation and neuroticism. Results contradict the existing research evidence that shyness is high among east Asian students (Paulhus, Duncan & Yik, 2002). There can be multiple explanation to this, firstly, the current research included participants engaging in both the online and offline mode of education. So, this might explain the mixed nature of results. Therefore, this adds on to the understanding of levels of shyness within a particular mode of education. The study also stated that students reported higher shyness in a classroom as compared to the social setting. Since present study studied shyness within a social setting and in our collectivistic culture we as individuals emphasize cultural harmony and interdependence speaking for lower levels of shyness among students within the social settings. Shyness within the Indian context is emphasized and acknowledged to an extent. "Keeping your eyes down, your voice low" is what recommend to Indian children. And this is understood as the "ideal" behavioural norm.

of Shyness showed no significant relationship with resilience, self-regulation and neuroticism. This finding came as a surprise since the existing research evidence pointed in the other direction. Afshan, Askari and Manickam (2015) found shyness to be substantially linked with high levels of introversion and neuroticism. However, the negligible relationship observed between shyness and neuroticism could be explained in light of the study being conducted in a collectivistic culture (India) and collectivistic cultures promote esteem of the group over that of the individual, therefore it fosters greater emotional control and inhibition of personal expression. High emotional control therefore acts as a buffer preventing individuals from experiencing emotional turmoil. Shyness is something which is appreciated and valued in the Indian culture in the name of "etiquettes" therefore it's directly linked with neuroticism therefore it's

not seen as something problematic and doesn't interfere with individuals' emotions.

There is a significant negative relationship between resilience and neuroticism and resilience significantly predicts neuroticism as well. Results go in line with the existing evidence where resilience negatively predicts neuroticism (Pauly et al, 2021; Sahni, Kumari & Pachauri, 2021). In simpler terms resilience is defined as the ability to recover from difficult life events. Resilience provides emotional strength to cope with trauma and adversity. Individuals who are resilient adequately utilize their resources, strengths, and skills to overcome challenges. Therefore, People who are low on resilience are more likely to feel helpless, and rely on unhealthy coping strategies (such as avoidance and isolation).

Study also tried to evaluate the role of shyness as a moderating variable on the relationship between resilience / self-regulation and neuroticism. Results of the current study show no such mediation. This could be because shyness did not bear any significant association with any of the variables of study. This no relationship of shyness with all the variables can also be explained with the tools utilized, wherein, McCroskey Shyness Scale was used for assessing shyness among students in the current study, while existing literature shows the high usage of Cheek and Buss Shyness Scale (1981). Therefore, there might be a possibility of items in the McCroskey Shyness Scale not fitting into the Indian cultural context. Also, within the Indian system shyness is not that of a big problem as seen in Western societies. In the study a general understanding of shyness was assessed. A more context-specific shyness could be assessed for a more deeper understanding like in the classroom, while talking with strangers, initiating a conversation. As for the results, shyness played no mediating role in the relationship between resilience/self-regulation and neuroticism.

## CONCLUSION

The study aimed to explore the relationship between character strengths, i.e. resilience and self-management, shyness and neuroticism among college going young

adults. Contrary to literature, shyness had no relationship with neuroticism, resilience and self-management. Similar was the case with self-management which had no significant relationship with any of the variables. Resilience turned out to be the predictor of neuroticism but not for shyness. The study's findings contributed to the paucity of research on resilience and neuroticism. Other findings have also contributed as there's a dearth of literature on the exploration of the relationship among these concerned variables.

### Limitations, Implications and Future Directions

The findings of the current study need to be looked at critically. The sample size is small, and consists of college going students only, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The limited number of character strengths were taken, in further studies more character strengths need to be explored. There might be a strong tendency of social desirability since the questionnaires were quite lengthy. The context specific shyness could have been studied for better understanding. The self-report-based data was collected which leads to biases. Lastly, form was in the English language which was also a barrier as not everyone is comfortable with English.

Along with these limitations there are some strengths as well, firstly character strengths of resiliency and self-regulation were seen as possible predictors of shyness and neuroticism, secondly a mediation model was tested to see if shyness plays any role between resilience/ self-regulation and neuroticism. Third, the majority of the research in context to shyness have been done on school students therefore present study did try to explore shyness among undergraduate and postgraduate students.

With these limitations and strengths, future researchers can work on exploring more on context-specific shyness, to generate a deeper understanding on shyness and resilience, predictors of shyness and how it impacts other areas of an individual's life. More character strengths could be explored in context of shyness in order to get more efficient results.

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