ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN SELF-RATED HEALTH AND PERSONALITY

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INTRODUCTION

Subjective reports of health status are commonly used in research as proxies for actual health status or mortality. The terms subjective health and self-rated health appear to be used synonymously in previous literature; we will use these terms interchangeably throughout.

Personality and Health

Previous research has shown a significant relationship between several health-related variables and personality. Specifically, Hagger-Johnson et al found that in a UK sample, high neuroticism in low-SES women was a risk for CVD mortality; however, high neuroticism in high-SES women was protective and did not increase CVD mortality risk. High neuroticism also has been associated with greater incidences of negative emotions, stress, and less impulse control. Booth-Kewley and Vickers found neuroticism was associated with fewer wellness behaviors, less accident control behavior, and more traffic risk-taking behavior. Meanwhile, Löckenhoff et al found neuroticism to be negatively associated with mental health in two samples and with physical health in one study sample (Baltimore Longitudinal Study of Aging).

In addition, higher levels of extraversion have been shown to promote both positive health behaviors (eg, more wellness behaviors and accident control) and negative health behaviors (eg, smoking). Conscientiousness has been related to better wellness behaviors, more accident control, and less traffic risk-taking. In fact, a meta-analysis revealed that conscientiousness-related traits were negatively related to all risky health-related behaviors and positively related to all beneficial health-related behaviors. Regarding agreeableness, Booth-Kewley and Vickers found that agreeableness was associated with more wellness behaviors, more accident control, and less traffic risk-taking. Finally, Openness has been related to greater substance risk-taking and was the only statistically significant personality predictor of substance risk-taking.

Personality and Self-Rated Health

Although many studies have examined associations among personality traits and physical health and behaviors, fewer studies have focused on the associations between self-rated or subjective health and personality. Furthermore, there have been inconsistencies in the literature in how personality traits and self-rated health are related due in part to methodological limitations.

Studies have shown that people higher on neuroticism report more physical symptoms and are more likely to over-report symptoms in general. One study found extraversion was positively related to subjective mental health in two samples, although no association was found between extraversion and physical health. Furthermore, one of the few studies to examine the association between openness and agreeableness and subjective health found openness to be a positive predictor of self-rated physical health after controlling for the effects of age and hospitalization, but it did not find a relationship between agreeableness and self-rated health. Interestingly, another study found that higher levels of agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness and lower levels of Neuroticism were associated with increased tendency to report health symptoms.

One remaining gap in the literature is how personality relates to self-rated...