

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# Personality determinants of attitudes toward seeking mental health services

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**ABSTRACT**

Mental health service utilization remains low in the Philippines despite high rates of psychological distress and recent legislative reforms; and understanding individual and cultural determinants of help-seeking is seen as critical. This cross-sectional study investigated the influence of personality factors on attitudes toward seeking mental health services among Filipino adults. Using standardized measures, data were collected from 294 Filipino respondents. Descriptive analysis revealed personality trait profiles with high Agreeableness, Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, and low Neuroticism which indicate a generally positive orientation toward seeking professional psychological help and less stigmatized approach to seeking mental health support. In addition, correlation analysis revealed that conscientiousness ( $r = .155, p < .001$ ) and extraversion ( $r = .128, p < .05$ ) are positively associated with psychological openness and help-seeking propensity attitudes respectively; conscientiousness ( $r = .131, p < .05$ ) is positively associated with indifference to stigma; while neuroticism ( $r = -.209, p < .001; r = -.128, p < .05$ ) was negatively associated with psychological openness and indifference to stigma. Personality traits of conscientiousness and extraversion serve as facilitating factors for psychological openness and help-seeking propensity, while neuroticism consistently acts as a barrier, diminishing openness and imposing sensitivity to stigma. The results serve as a basis in recommending culturally sensitive interventions that address both internal and systemic barriers to improve mental health service utilization in the Filipino context.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The utilization of mental health services among Filipinos is a critical public health issue that has received increasing attention in recent years. The Philippines has seen a rise in the prevalence of mental health conditions, particularly depression, which affects an estimated 3.3 million Filipinos. (Puyat et al., 2021) This concerning statistic underscores the urgent need to understand the factors that influence mental health service utilization within the Filipino community.

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The literature on mental health services in the Philippines highlights significant challenges in the accessibility and availability of comprehensive mental healthcare. The Philippines has recently passed its first Mental Health Act in 2017, which aims to establish access to integrated mental health services and protect the rights of individuals with mental disorders. However, the mental health system remains underfunded, with only 3-5% of the total health budget allocated to mental health, and 70% of this is spent on hospital care (Lally et al., 2019). This has resulted in a severe shortage of mental health professionals and a lack of well-developed community-based mental health services.

Research suggests that among Filipino children aged 5 to 15, 10% to 15% are affected by mental health problems, and 16.8% of Filipino students aged 13 to 17 have attempted suicide at least once within a year (Malolos et al., 2021). These alarming statistics emphasize the need for early intervention and prevention efforts to address the mental health needs of Filipino youth.

The limited availability of mental health services has likely contributed to the underutilization of these services among Filipinos. Studies have identified several barriers to mental health service utilization, including stigma, lack of awareness about available resources, and cultural beliefs that discourage seeking professional help for mental health issues (Puyat et al., 2021; Malolos et al., 2021; Lally et al., 2019). To address these mental health challenges, a comprehensive approach is needed, involving increased funding for mental health services, the development of community-based programs, and public education campaigns to reduce stigma and promote help-seeking behaviors.

Filipinos across the world have a general reluctance and unfavorable attitude towards formal help-seeking despite high rates of psychological distress. This is mainly due to cultural beliefs that emphasize self-reliance, family-centered problem solving, and the stigma associated with mental health conditions. Several factors affect the utilization of mental health services among Filipinos, including stigma, limited mental health literacy, cultural beliefs, economic constraints, and accessibility. Stigma leads to reluctance in seeking help due to fear of judgment. Limited awareness prevents recognition of mental health issues and treatment options. Traditional beliefs promote reliance on family support over professional services. Economic barriers, including high costs and limited insurance, hinder access. Additionally, the shortage of mental health professionals and inadequate services, especially in rural areas, further restricts service utilization.

Filipino cultural emphasis on self-reliance often hinders professional mental health help-seeking. Family-centered problem solving is a common approach, with Filipinos often relying on informal support rather than formal mental health services (Martinez et al., 2020). Filipinos often prioritize family and friends for support, viewing professional help as a last resort. Their cultural resilience, while positive, can hinder timely mental health care, leading to downplaying mental health concerns and delaying professional help-seeking. They utilize special mental health care only as a last resort or when problems become severe.

The relationship between personality factors and mental health has been a topic of significant interest in the field of psychology, as researchers have sought to understand the complex interplay between an individual's innate characteristics and their psychological well-being. Personality, which encompasses an individual's unique and relatively stable psychological traits, is a significant predictor of various aspects of mental health, including emotional regulation, behavioral patterns, and overall life satisfaction (Zhang & Yu, 2020).

Studies have explored specific ways in which personality factors influence mental health. According to the Five-Factor Model of personality, traits such as Neuroticism and Extraversion are the most strongly associated with mental health outcomes (Kang et al., 2023). Individuals who score high on

the Neuroticism trait tend to experience more negative emotions, respond poorly to stress, and may struggle with impulsivity and psychological distress, which can contribute to the development of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression (Widiger & Oltmanns, 2017).

Conversely, those who score high on the Extraversion trait tend to enjoy social interactions, experience positive emotions more easily, and generally exhibit better mental health outcomes (Kang et al., 2023). However, the relationship between personality and mental health is not limited to these two traits, as research has also shown that individuals who score high on Agreeableness may have worse mental health outcomes. In comparison, those who score high on Openness and Conscientiousness may have better outcomes (Carr, 2012).

The influence of personality on mental health is further supported by the evidence that personality traits can serve as both risk factors and protective factors for the development of mental health issues (Economics Observatory, 2021). For example, individuals with high levels of Neuroticism may be more vulnerable to developing affective disorders, such as depression and anxiety. In contrast, those with high levels of Extraversion may be better equipped to cope with stressful situations and maintain a sense of well-being (Widiger & Oltmanns, 2017).

Moreover, the relationship between personality and mental health is not unidirectional, as mental health can also impact an individual's personality. As noted in a meta-synthesis study, personality is a significant predictor of overall health and well-being (Huang et al., 2017). This reciprocal relationship highlights the complex and dynamic nature of the interaction between personality and mental health.

This study on the influence of personality factors on mental health service utilization underscores the importance of considering an individual's unique personality characteristics when attempting to understand and address their mental health needs. The study generally aims to examine the level of Filipino adults' personality traits and their attitudes in seeking mental health services, and the existing relationship between each personality factor and their attitudes on mental health services utilization.

## METHOD

The quantitative study employed a cross-sectional design to investigate the relationship and main effects of personality factor measures on the seeking of mental health services among a selected group of Filipino respondents.

Data collection spanned three months, during which survey forms were disseminated both in-person and online using a convenience sampling technique. Selected respondents were at least 18 years old and were natural-born Filipino citizens. There are 294 respondents in the study; 187 are female, eight prefer not to say, and 99 are male. Based on employment status, 133 were employed at the time of the study, while 161 were unemployed, primarily students, with an average age of 26 years. Informed consent is thoroughly discussed prior to the dissemination of the survey forms. The three phases of the data collection covered the respondents' salient demographic data; the measure of the Big Five Inventory (BFI), and a mental health help-seeking intention questionnaire. Research ethical procedures, data security, and confidentiality were rigorously followed.

Two standardized measures are used to measure the personality traits and attitudes toward mental health service utilization of the respondents. The Big Five Inventory (BFI) is a 44-item self-report measure that assesses personality traits across five broad domains: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience. Each personality dimension is measured numerically, using a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Second, the Inventory of Attitudes toward Seeking Mental Health Services (IASMHS) was also used to measure the help-seeking attitudes (Mackenzie et al, 2004). It consists of 24 items rated using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale is divided into three (3) distinct factors: (a) psychological openness, (b) help-seeking propensity, and (c) indifference to stigma. Psychological openness refers to the degree to which an individual is willing to acknowledge the presence of a psychological problem and seek professional care for it. Help-seeking propensity reflects one's willingness and perceived ability to seek help for psychological problems. Indifference to stigma refers to how concerned an individual would feel if significant others were to discover that they were receiving psychological care.

The Jamovi application was used to conduct the statistical analysis of the gathered data. Techniques included descriptive statistics, such as mean, frequency, and standard deviation, and Spearman's rho correlation was utilized to determine the levels of the measured variables and the relationship between personality traits and attitudes towards mental health services among the respondents.

## RESULT

The study gathered data from 294 respondents to explore the relationship between personality traits and attitudes toward mental health service utilization. Descriptive statistics were calculated for both attitude domains and personality factors measured by validated scales.

Personality traits, as measured by the Big Five Inventory, revealed distinct patterns among the respondents. Agreeableness emerged as the highest-scoring trait ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = .57$ ), indicating a tendency to be cooperative, compassionate, and trusting, which may influence positive interpersonal interactions and encourage help-seeking behaviors. Second, Openness to Experience ( $M = 3.49$ ,  $SD = .52$ ) indicates that respondents are generally receptive to the concept of psychological openness and the acceptance of mental health services. Conscientiousness, with a mean score of 3.45 ( $SD = .54$ ), reflects a tendency toward internal states, such as responsibility and self-discipline traits, that may support proactive health behaviors, including seeking mental health support. Extraversion showed a moderate level ( $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = .41$ ), indicating average sociability and assertiveness, which can influence the likelihood of discussing mental health concerns and seeking help. Neuroticism scored the lowest ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = .68$ ), suggesting relatively lower levels of emotional instability and negative affect among respondents. Given that neuroticism is often linked with increased mental health challenges, its lower score in this sample presents a prosocial behavior that can lead to help-seeking attitudes.

**Table 1.** Levels of Personality Traits

Personality Traits	Mean	Standard Deviation
Openness to Experience	3.49	.52
Conscientiousness	3.46	.54
Extraversion	3.13	.41
Agreeableness	3.60	.58
Neuroticism	3.00	.67

The attitude toward mental health services was evaluated across three key domains: Help-Seeking Propensity, Psychological Openness, and Indifference to Stigma. Among these, the Help-Seeking Propensity domain recorded the highest mean score ( $M = 3.74$ ,  $SD = .61$ ), indicating that respondents generally demonstrate a strong willingness or readiness to seek professional psychological help when necessary. This suggests a generally positive attitude toward utilizing mental health services. Psychological Openness showed a moderate mean score ( $M = 3.16$ ,  $SD = .58$ ), reflecting a fair degree of openness among respondents to acknowledge and discuss psychological problems. This critical

factor often precedes actual help-seeking behavior. In contrast, Indifference to Stigma had the lowest mean score ( $M = 2.45$ ,  $SD = .72$ ), showing a low sensitivity to the social stigma associated with mental health issues.

**Table 2.** Levels of Attitude on Mental Health Services

Attitude Factor	Mean	Standard Deviation
Psychological Openness (PO)	3.17	0.58
Help-seeking Propensity (HP)	3.74	0.61
Indifference to Stigma (IS)	2.47	0.72

Group mean comparison between groups of respondents: (1) employed respondents (133) and (2) unemployed respondents (161) via an independent samples t-test was conducted to examine the differences in their personality traits. Results revealed several significant differences. Openness to Experience showed no meaningful difference between groups ( $t = -1.28$ ,  $p = .202$ ); the same with Extraversion trait comparison ( $t = -1.01$ ,  $p = .309$ ). Meanwhile, Conscientiousness ( $t = 4.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was significantly higher among employed individuals ( $M = 3.58$ ,  $SD = .53$ ) compared to their unemployed counterparts ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = .54$ ), indicating greater organization, responsibility, and self-discipline in the employed group. Agreeableness ( $t = 3.43$ ,  $p = .001$ ) was significantly higher in the employed group ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ) compared to the unemployed group ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = 0.52$ ), reflecting greater cooperativeness and interpersonal warmth that may facilitate positive interpersonal relationships. Lastly, Neuroticism ( $t = -4.25$ ,  $p < .001$ ) was significantly lower among employed respondents ( $M = 2.83$ ,  $SD = .69$ ) than among unemployed respondents ( $M = 3.17$ ,  $SD = .67$ ), suggesting that employed individuals tend to have greater emotional stability and lower susceptibility to stress and negative emotions.

**Table 3.** Mean Comparison of Personality Traits

Personality Traits	computed t	p value	Interpretation
Openness to Experience	-1.280	.202	Not significant
Conscientiousness	4.237	.000	Significant
Extraversion	1.019	.309	Not significant
Agreeableness	3.438	.001	Significant
Neuroticism	-4.251	.000	Significant

Moreover, the group mean comparison in the domains of attitude in mental health services utilization showed no significant differences between the identified groups. Both employed and unemployed (student) groups demonstrate similar levels of openness to mental health issues, willingness to seek help, and sensitivity to stigma, implying that factors other than employment or work relations may play a more critical role in shaping these attitudes.

**Table 4.** Mean Comparison of Attitude on Mental Health Services

Attitude Factor	computed t	p value	Interpretation
Psychological Openness (PO)	1.597	.111	Not significant
Help-seeking Propensity (HP)	-.168	.866	Not significant
Indifference to Stigma (IS)	-.865	.388	Not significant

The correlation analysis between personality factors and attitudes toward mental health services reveals several noteworthy relationships. Psychological Openness exhibits a significant positive correlation with Conscientiousness ( $r = .155$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and a significant negative correlation with Neuroticism ( $r = -.209$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This suggests that more conscientious individuals tend to be more open to acknowledging and discussing psychological problems. At the same time, those with higher neuroticism are less psychologically open. Help-seeking propensity is also significantly positively correlated with Extraversion ( $r = .128$ ,  $p < .05$ ), indicating that individuals who are more sociable and

assertive are somewhat more likely to seek professional psychological help. Hence, this result suggests that extraversion uniquely facilitates the willingness to seek mental health services.

Meanwhile, Indifference to Stigma is positively correlated with Conscientiousness ( $r = .131, p < .05$ ) and negatively correlated with Neuroticism ( $r = -.128, p < .05$ ). This suggests that more conscientious individuals tend to be less sensitive to stigma, characterized by greater self-discipline and trust. In contrast, those with higher neuroticism are affected by stigma, potentially due to increased anxiety or fear of negative judgment.

**Table 5.** Relationship between personality traits and attitude towards mental health services

	Spearman's r	p-value	Interpretation
Psychological Openness – Conscientiousness	.155	.008	Significant
Psychological Openness – Neuroticism	-.209	< .001	Significant
Help Seeking Propensity – Extraversion	.128	.028	Significant
Indifference to Stigma – Conscientiousness	.131	.025	Significant
Indifference to Stigma – Neuroticism	-.128	.029	Significant

## DISCUSSION

This study offers valuable insights into the relationship between personality traits and attitudes toward mental health service utilization among a selected group of adult Filipino respondents. The initial results revealed a generally positive orientation toward seeking psychological help, alongside a distinct pattern of five personality traits that appear to underpin these attitudes. Specifically, a strong Help-Seeking Propensity and a moderate level of psychological openness are evident among respondents. This suggests a readiness and willingness to acknowledge and discuss psychological problems, which are critical precursors to actual help-seeking behavior (Carvalho et al., 2024). This positive orientation aligns with the broader understanding that help-seeking is an adaptive coping process essential for managing psychological distress (De Leon, 2025).

A noteworthy finding is the low levels of Indifference to Stigma, which implies a decreased sensitivity to the social stigma associated with mental health issues. This contradicts extensive literature that consistently identifies mental health stigma as a significant barrier to help-seeking globally (Henderson et. al., 2013). In the relevant context, public stigma is characterized by negative societal attitudes and self-stigma, which involves internalizing negative perceptions that are known to lead to reluctance, avoidance, and delays in seeking necessary treatment (Alnassar et al., 2024). The fear of being judged or labeled is a common deterrent, especially among young people (Lannin & Bible, 2022). The current finding suggests that for these specific adult Filipino respondents, the pervasive influence of stigma can be mitigated, allowing a positive help-seeking attitude to emerge. This reduced sensitivity to stigma is a crucial protective factor that warrants further exploration of underlying mechanisms, potentially linked to the unique personality profile of the study respondents or a supportive environmental context.

A compelling explanation for the observed attitudes, in terms of the Big Five personality factors, relates to the respondents' attitude toward seeking mental help. Agreeableness emerged as the highest-scoring trait, indicating a tendency to be cooperative, compassionate, and trusting of specific individuals. This aligns with the study by Murphy and Mackenzie (2023), which consistently associates high agreeableness with positive attitudes and behaviors toward help-seeking. Agreeable individuals are generally more inclined to seek support from others due to their trusting nature and positive approach to social interactions (Kalra & Gautam, 2024). These internal states of compassion and willingness to engage with others directly contribute to a reduced experience or expression of stigma, providing a strong basis for the "low sensitivity to stigma" observed in the study.

The respondents' openness to experience is generally receptive to new ideas. This trait is often positively associated with seeking help for personal and emotional problems (Samuel et al., 2018) and greater engagement in psychotherapy. Higher openness is strongly and negatively associated with mental illness stigma (Yelpaze & Ceyhan, 2020). This directly underpins the "Psychological Openness" observed in the findings, as individuals with this trait are inherently more receptive to acknowledging and discussing psychological problems.

Conscientiousness reflects a tendency toward responsibility and self-discipline. This trait is significantly associated with a higher intention to seek mental health help (Shabrina et al., 2022). Conscientious individuals are known to be more compliant with health regimens (Tokarek et al., 2023) and tend to seek order in the face of stressful situations. This supports the notion that conscientiousness is responsive to a proactive, responsible approach to well-being, where seeking professional help is viewed as a discipline strategy for maintaining mental health.

Extraversion is indicative of average sociability and assertiveness. The relationship between extraversion and help-seeking is complex in the literature, with some studies suggesting it is protective regarding help-seeking intentions and positively associated with seeking social support (Szücs et al., 2025). The moderate level of extraversion suggests a degree of sociability that facilitates discussing mental health concerns and pursuing help, reinforcing an individual's overall positive orientation.

Neuroticism showed an insightful finding. With the results showing the lowest trait, this suggests relatively lower levels of emotional instability and negative affect among the respondents. High neuroticism is often characterized by anxiety, moodiness, and emotional instability and is frequently linked with increased mental health challenges (Mostowik et al., 2022; Widiger & Oltmanns, 2017). Its relationship with help-seeking is complex. The low Neuroticism score in the study is a significant protective factor. It implies that individuals with low levels of neuroticism are less prone to chronic stress, negative thought patterns, and the emotional instability often associated with high neuroticism. This emotional stability likely reduces the need for distress-driven help-seeking, allowing proactive and open help-seeking driven by other positive traits, such as Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, to dominate. This also contributes to "low sensitivity to stigma" by reducing the self-doubt and fear of judgment often associated with high neuroticism.

The significant relationship between Psychological Openness and Conscientiousness aligns with the understanding that conscientiousness, characterized by responsibility, self-discipline, and a goal-directed approach, may predispose individuals to a proactive attitude toward their well-being (Shabrina et al., 2022; Bogg & Roberts, 2014). Seeking mental health assistance can be viewed as a responsible and disciplined behavior aimed at maintaining mental well-being and developing practical coping skills (De Leon, 2025). Hence, a conscientious individual's commitment to order and self-improvement could naturally extend to a greater willingness to confront and discuss their internal psychological state.

Conversely, the study also revealed a significant negative correlation between Psychological Openness and Neuroticism, indicating that individuals with higher neuroticism are less psychologically open. Neuroticism is characterized by a propensity for emotional instability and negative affect, often leading to excessive worry and self-doubt. Individuals high in neuroticism may struggle with negative thought patterns and emotional distress, which can create internal barriers to acknowledging and discussing psychological problems. Meta-analyses consistently report negative associations between neuroticism and help-seeking attitudes (Szücs et al., 2025), reinforcing that emotional vulnerability can hinder openness to addressing mental health concerns.

A significant relationship exists between Help-Seeking Propensity and extraversion, indicating that individuals who are more sociable and assertive are somewhat more likely to seek professional psychological help. This result is consistent with research indicating that extraverted individuals, due to their propensity for seeking social interactions, may be more inclined to seek support (Çekici, 2019; Kalra & Gautam, 2024). The social comfort and assertiveness inherent in extraversion likely facilitate the act of reaching out for professional assistance, making the interpersonal step of seeking help less difficult.

Moreover, while direct literature on conscientiousness and stigma sensitivity is limited, conscientiousness is associated with responsibility, self-discipline, and proactive health behaviors. A disciplined approach to one's well-being, coupled with a focus on achieving goals, may reduce the impact of perceived social judgment surrounding mental health concerns. Seeking help is viewed as a responsible action; hence, the external perception of stigma can be lessened for conscientious individuals. Conversely, a significant negative correlation between Indifference to Stigma and Neuroticism denotes that higher levels of neuroticism are more affected by self-stigma, potentially due to increased anxiety or fear of negative judgment. This aligns strongly with existing literature, which consistently links higher neuroticism to experiencing more stigma (Tomas Smigura, 2020). This heightened emotional vulnerability amplifies the impact of negative perception, making it a more significant barrier to help-seeking.

## CONCLUSION

The study investigated the profound influence of personality factors on an individual's attitudes toward mental health service utilization. The unique personality profile characterized by high Agreeableness, Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, and low Neuroticism collectively responds to a proactive, receptive, and less stigmatized approach to seeking mental health support. In addition, conscientiousness and extraversion serve as facilitating factors for psychological openness and help-seeking propensity, while neuroticism consistently acts as a barrier, diminishing openness and imposing sensitivity to stigma. These findings contribute to a better understanding of individual differences in mental health engagement and highlight the importance of considering personality profiles when developing targeted interventions to promote help-seeking and reduce the pervasive impact of stigma around mental health.

## DECLARATION

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### Author contribution statement

Camille V. De Leon was primarily responsible for the final writing and publishing of this article. Maria Zharina F. Sanchez contributed to the data collection of the study.

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## Data access statement

The data described in this article can be accessed by contacting the primary author.

## Declaration of interest's statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

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