Relations Among Neuroticism, Coping, and Distress
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Background
• Neuroticism is characterized by negative emotionality and stress reactivity, and is a robust predictor of distress (Barlow et al., 2013)
• Neuroticism can be viewed as a stable personality trait
• It is important to identify the mechanisms that link neuroticism to distress. One such mechanism is coping, which can be defined as personality in action under stress (Bolger, 1990)
• Individuals with higher neuroticism are:
  • more likely to use maladaptive coping with stressors
  • less likely to use adaptive coping strategies
  • less likely to perceive control over their stressors (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007)
• Research on coping is retrospective, cross-sectional measures, which are prone to biases (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010)

Specific Aims
• Examine how neuroticism and distress levels correlated to participant’s daily use of adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies.
• Examine coping over a 14-day period using a longitudinal, daily diary design

Method
Participants
• Students recruited from undergraduate psychology classes (N = 260)
• Most identified as White/European American (71%) and female (74%)
• Mean age = 21 years old (SD = 3.49)

Materials
• Personality: Big Five-Short Form
• Stressors: Checklists of 9 stressors
• Stressor severity: 4-pt rating of severity of stressor severity
• Coping: Coping Strategies Inventory-Short Form; R-COPE for rumination
• Distress: CCAPS-34
• Smartphone app for daily diaries

Procedure
• Pre-diary (T1): Participants completed the personality measure online
• Diaries: Participants were notified at 9pm every evening for 14 nights via the smartphone app.
• Asked to complete brief, daily survey that assessed: Coping, stressor severity, and number of stressors
• Post-diary (T2): Participants completed the distress measure online

Results (r values)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily Maladaptive</th>
<th>Neuroticism (T1)</th>
<th>Distress (T2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem Avoidance</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.34**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wishful Thinking</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.43**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Criticism</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.49**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Withdrawal</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.36**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily Adaptive</th>
<th>Neuroticism (T1)</th>
<th>Distress (T2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Express Emotions</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Restructuring</td>
<td>-.17**</td>
<td>-.24**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>-.33**</td>
<td>-.43**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean stressor severity rating: .33** .39**
Average number of stressors per day: .19** .40**
Present Control: -.38** -.44**

Neuroticism (T1) & Distress (T2): .57**

(* p < .05; ** p < .01)

Discussion
• Neuroticism was positively correlated with the use of maladaptive strategies across all time points (Neuroticism and daily maladaptive coping r = .36**)
• Neuroticism was associated with:
  • greater use of daily maladaptive coping strategies
  • less use of daily adaptive coping strategies
• Participants with higher levels of neuroticism had more stressors (r = .19) and perceived them as more stressful (r = .33)
• Regarding maladaptive coping strategies, participants reported using wishful thinking most frequently and problem avoidance least frequently

• Maladaptive coping strategies were more strongly related to distress levels than were adaptive strategies

Strengths
• Longitudinal design
• Daily measures of coping

Limitations
• The sample was primarily comprised of White and female undergraduate students

Implications
• Given recent evidence of personality change after interventions (Roberts et al., 2017), coping interventions that target the identified maladaptive strategies in this study may be one way to reduce neuroticism and distress levels

References