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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Do personality differences between students from different schools generalize across countries?

Dear Sir

We read with particular interest the paper “Variation in personality traits of medical students between schools of medicine” (Wilson et al. 2013). That study compared personality traits (NEOFFI) of undergraduate vs. graduate entry medical students in seven schools in Australia and found that higher Agreeableness and Conscientiousness were associated with attending an undergraduate school (OR = 1.07 and 1.03, respectively).

We have replicated the regression analysis (backward logistic regression, with undergraduate versus graduate being predicted by NEOFFI personality traits controlling for gender and age) in a sample of 529 medical students (75% of undergraduate students, n = 397) from three different medical schools in Portugal.

As expected, we have found similar results for age: older students were more likely to be graduate entry students (OR = 3.14, 95% CI 2.47–4.00, p < 0.001). However, age presented significantly higher impact in our study.

The only personality trait that was statistically significant between the two school types was Conscientiousness (OR = 1.10, 95% CI 1.00–1.21, p = 0.049), with graduate students being the most conscientious ones. This result is the opposite of what Wilson et al. obtained. Also, contrarily to authors’ results, Agreeableness was not a significant predictor of attending a particular school type. When performing a binary logistic regression with either method, Agreeableness presented similar effect size, although higher scores were associated with graduate entry (OR = 1.04, 95% CI 0.90–1.21, p = 0.120) and not with undergraduate entry. This non-significance could be explained by the difference in size of the two samples.

The highlight from our study is that relations between personality and attendance of graduate entry versus high school entry schools probably do not generalize across countries. More in depth studies are necessary to clarify whether the differences are caused by educational policies – for example; admissions policies, cultural factors, religion, level of development, etc. – or others.

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