

Personality traits as risk factors of relapse or recurrence in major depression: a systematic review

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ABSTRACT

Major depressive disorder (MDD) is highly recurrent. Identifying risk factors for relapse in depression is essential to improve prevention plans and therapeutic outcomes. Personality traits and personality disorders are widely considered to impact the outcome of MDD. We aimed to evaluate the role of personality aspects in the risk of relapse and recurrence in MDD.

a PROSPERO-registered systematic review was conducted using Medline, Embase, PsycInfo, Web of Science and CINAHL as data sources, together with hand searching of four journals over the last five years (2018-2022). There was independent abstract selection, quality assessment and data extraction from each study.

Nineteen studies met eligibility criteria with a total sample of 8587 people. Neuroticism was significantly associated with the risk of relapse and recurrence of depression. Dependent personality style was another relevant risk factor. The presence of personality disorders, particularly borderline personality disorder and obsessive-compulsive personality disorder, have also been reported as increasing the risk for relapse of depression.

The small number, in addition to the methodological heterogeneity of the included studies, could not allow further analysis, such as meta-analysis.

People with high neuroticism, dependent personality, borderline personality disorder or obsessive-compulsive personality disorder, compared to those without, may be at a higher risk of experiencing relapse or recurrence of MDD. Specific and targeted interventions may potentially reduce relapse and recurrence rates in these groups and could improve outcomes.

Keywords: Depression, personality disorders, personality traits, recurrence, relapse