

Childhood Physical and Emotional Trauma and Personality Profiles among Students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi

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ABSTRACT

Childhood trauma is increasingly recognized as an important developmental experience with potential implications for personality functioning beyond childhood. This study examined the association between childhood physical and emotional trauma and personality profiles among students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The study involved 395 undergraduate students selected through stratified and simple random sampling from an estimated university population of 35,000 students. Data were collected using the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire-Short Form (CTQ-SF) and the 30-item Big Five Inventory-2 Short Form (BFI-2-S). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and multivariate analyses of variance at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings showed that childhood physical trauma had a significant multivariate association with the combined personality dimensions, Wilks' $\Lambda = .079$, $F(105, 1808.94) = 11.75$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .399$. Physical trauma was significantly associated with extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness, with the strongest effect observed for openness. Childhood emotional trauma also demonstrated a significant multivariate association with the combined personality dimensions, Wilks' $\Lambda = .032$, $F(70, 1794.21) = 27.05$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .496$. Emotional trauma was significantly associated with extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness, but not agreeableness, with neuroticism showing the strongest association. When physical and emotional trauma were examined jointly, both demonstrated significant multivariate effects on personality profiles, with emotional trauma showing a particularly strong association with neuroticism. The study concludes that childhood physical and emotional trauma are significantly associated with personality profiles among students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi. The findings underscore the importance of trauma-informed counselling, psychological screening, resilience-building interventions, and psychosocial support within university settings. Future research should examine protective factors and use longitudinal designs to clarify the temporal relationship between childhood trauma and personality development.

Keywords: childhood trauma, physical trauma, emotional trauma, personality profiles, Big Five, university students, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Personality remains one of the enduring areas of inquiry in psychology, reflecting the relatively stable patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving through which individuals engage with their social, academic, and cultural environments. Across diverse educational contexts in North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa, scholars have examined the ways personality traits influence students' learning processes, adjustment to university life, interpersonal relationships, and longer-term developmental outcomes. Among the major theoretical frameworks, the Five-Factor Model (Big Five) has gained widespread acceptance because of its strong empirical foundation and demonstrated cross-cultural applicability. The model conceptualizes personality across five broad domains: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (McCrae & Costa,

2020). Evidence from different regions suggests that these traits are associated with important student outcomes, including academic persistence, emotional adjustment, and interpersonal competence (John & Soto, 2021). Such evidence provides an important basis for examining the factors that may be associated with personality profiles within specific national and institutional contexts, including Nigerian universities.

Although personality traits demonstrate considerable stability, personality development does not occur independently of environmental experiences. Early life experiences, particularly adverse experiences, have been increasingly recognized as important factors in understanding individual differences in personality. Childhood trauma, including physical and emotional abuse, may influence developmental pathways through which characteristic patterns of emotional regulation, interpersonal interaction, and behavioural responses emerge. Research across different cultural contexts has reported associations between histories of childhood maltreatment and personality characteristics, with individuals exposed to maltreatment tending to report higher neuroticism, reflecting greater emotional vulnerability and sensitivity to stress, alongside lower levels of extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness (Koschig et al., 2023). These findings suggest that childhood adversity may extend beyond its immediate psychological consequences and be associated with patterns of personality functioning that persist into later developmental stages.

Childhood trauma is defined by the World Health Organization (2020) as harmful or threatening experiences occurring before the age of 18, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and other adverse conditions. Physical trauma may involve experiences such as beating, slapping, or other forms of bodily harm, whereas emotional trauma may include humiliation, persistent criticism, rejection, or other experiences that undermine a child's sense of worth and security. Exposure to such experiences may interfere with healthy psychological development and contribute to maladaptive coping patterns later in life (Shields & Young, 2022; Afifi et al., 2020). In this regard, childhood trauma may influence how individuals perceive themselves and others, regulate emotions, respond to stress, and navigate interpersonal relationships, all of which are relevant to the expression of personality in adolescence and adulthood.

The Nigerian context is particularly important because evidence suggests that childhood maltreatment remains prevalent among young people. Adeosun et al. (2024), for instance, found that more than 80% of adolescents in Oyo State reported histories of physical or emotional abuse, highlighting the magnitude of childhood maltreatment as a social and psychological concern. Similarly, Okafor and Ede (2021) linked adverse childhood experiences among university students to depression, poor social adjustment, and risky behaviours. While these studies demonstrate the substantial psychological and behavioural consequences associated with childhood adversity, relatively less attention has been given to how specific forms of childhood trauma, particularly physical and emotional trauma, relate to personality profiles among Nigerian university students. This represents an important gap, particularly given evidence from international research linking early adverse experiences with enduring patterns of personality functioning.

Nasarawa State University, Keffi, therefore provides a relevant setting for examining this relationship. The university comprises students from diverse ethnic, cultural, social, and socioeconomic backgrounds, reflecting some of the broader diversity of the Nigerian population. Such diversity also implies considerable variation in students' early-life experiences and the environments in which their psychological development occurred. Examining the association between childhood physical and emotional trauma and personality profiles among students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi, may therefore contribute to a better understanding of how early adverse experiences relate to individual differences in personality within a Nigerian university context. Beyond contributing to the existing literature, such evidence may provide useful insights for student counselling, psychological assessment, early intervention, and the development of support systems that recognize the potential long-term implications of adverse childhood experiences on students' psychological adjustment and functioning.

Statement of the Problem

Personality traits are important correlates of human behaviour, interpersonal relationships, psychological adjustment, and academic functioning (McCrae & Costa, 2020; John & Soto, 2021). Although personality has

substantial biological and temperamental foundations, evidence increasingly indicates that environmental experiences, particularly those occurring during childhood, may contribute to individual differences in personality development and expression (Luo & Zhong, 2025). Childhood trauma has been associated with enduring psychological and behavioural consequences, including higher neuroticism and lower levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness, suggesting that adverse experiences during formative years may have implications for personality functioning beyond childhood (Huh et al., 2023; Shields & Young, 2022).

The magnitude of childhood adversity makes this issue an important public health and developmental concern. Globally, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are widespread, with a meta-analysis estimating that approximately 60.1% of adults had experienced at least one ACE and 16.1% had experienced four or more ACEs before the age of 18 (Madigan et al., 2023). Exposure to multiple forms of adversity is particularly concerning because cumulative childhood experiences may have broader and more persistent implications for psychological functioning. In Nigeria, available evidence similarly points to a substantial burden of childhood adversity among young people. Among higher education students in Southeast Nigeria, Agbaje et al. (2021) reported that 86.7% had experienced at least one ACE, while 41.3% had experienced four or more. The study also reported high levels of childhood sexual abuse, alongside substantial exposure to physical abuse and neglect, with these adverse experiences significantly associated with psychological distress in adulthood. Further evidence from a tertiary institution indicated that 91.4% of students had experienced at least one ACE, with emotional abuse and physical neglect particularly prevalent (Sekoni & Dania, 2024). Similarly, among in-school adolescents in Lagos, Akintola (2025) reported an overall ACE prevalence of 92.5%, including physical abuse (42.8%), emotional abuse (86.9%), sexual abuse (32.6%), and physical and emotional neglect (90.5%).

Despite the high prevalence of childhood adversity and its documented associations with psychological and behavioural outcomes, an important gap remains in understanding its relationship with personality profiles among Nigerian university students. Existing Nigerian studies have largely focused on outcomes such as psychological distress, depression, social adjustment, and risky behaviours, with comparatively limited attention to whether and how specific forms of childhood trauma, particularly physical and emotional trauma, are associated with the Big Five personality dimensions. This gap is significant because personality characteristics influence how individuals perceive and respond to their environments, regulate emotions, establish interpersonal relationships, and adapt to academic and social demands.

This gap is particularly relevant at Nasarawa State University, Keffi, where students come from diverse social, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds and may therefore have varied developmental experiences. Although concerns relating to students' adjustment, interpersonal relationships, resilience, and psychological well-being may be encountered within university settings, there is limited empirical evidence specific to the relationship between childhood physical and emotional trauma and personality profiles among students of the institution. In the absence of such evidence, it remains difficult to determine whether particular patterns of childhood adversity are associated with specific personality characteristics within this population.

The lack of context-specific evidence limits the ability of researchers and university-based mental health and student-support services to fully understand the developmental experiences that may underlie differences in students' psychological and interpersonal functioning. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the association between childhood physical and emotional trauma and the Big Five personality profiles among students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi. By examining this relationship within a Nigerian university context, the study aims to contribute empirical evidence to the growing literature on childhood adversity and personality development while providing a basis for more contextually informed approaches to student counselling, psychological assessment, and psychosocial support.

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

The general objective of the study is to examine the association between childhood physical and emotional trauma and personality profiles among students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine the association between childhood physical trauma and personality profiles among students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi;
2. Examine the association between childhood emotional trauma and personality profiles among students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi; and
3. Determine whether childhood physical and emotional trauma jointly significantly predict personality profiles among students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be tested in the study:

H₀₁: Childhood physical trauma will significantly predict personality profiles among students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

H₀₂: Childhood emotional trauma will significantly predict personality profiles among students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

H₀₃: Childhood physical and emotional trauma will jointly predict personality profiles among students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The empirical literature on childhood trauma and personality development has increasingly demonstrated that adverse experiences during childhood are associated with psychological characteristics that may persist into adolescence and adulthood. Research has examined this relationship across different populations and cultural contexts, with particular attention to neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience. Although the available evidence does not establish a uniform pattern across all studies, there is growing support for the view that childhood adversity is associated with meaningful differences in personality functioning.

Childhood Physical Trauma and Personality Profiles

Childhood physical trauma represents an important form of early adversity with potential implications for psychological and personality development. Experiences such as physical abuse may expose children to persistent fear, insecurity, and stress during important developmental periods. These experiences may subsequently be reflected in patterns of emotional regulation, interpersonal behaviour, and responses to stressful situations.

Beilharz et al. (2020) investigated the effects of childhood trauma and its subtypes on physical and psychological health, sleep quality, and autonomic functioning among adults in a non-clinical community sample. Participants completed measures of childhood trauma and underwent laboratory and overnight assessments of autonomic and sleep functioning. The findings showed that childhood trauma was associated with psychological distress, sleep disturbances, reduced emotional well-being, and lower perceived social support. Of particular relevance to physical trauma, childhood physical abuse was significantly associated with alterations in nocturnal heart rate and heart-rate variability. Although the study did not directly examine the Big Five personality dimensions, its findings demonstrate that childhood physical trauma may have enduring effects on emotional and physiological stress regulation. These findings are relevant to the present study because persistent alterations in stress response may form part of the broader psychological processes through which early physical adversity is associated with later personality characteristics.

Wang et al. (2018) examined the prevalence and psychosocial consequences of childhood trauma among 555 university students in China. The participants completed the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire alongside measures of depression, anxiety, dysfunctional attitudes, personality, and social support. The study found that 18.6% of participants reported moderate to severe childhood trauma. Students with childhood trauma recorded significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety, dysfunctional attitudes, psychoticism, and neuroticism, while they reported lower extraversion and social support than students without comparable trauma exposure. The findings provide direct evidence that childhood trauma among university students is associated with differences in personality-related characteristics, particularly elevated neuroticism and lower extraversion. However, the study considered childhood trauma broadly rather than focusing exclusively on physical trauma, making it difficult to determine whether the observed personality differences were specifically attributable to physical abuse.

Koschig et al. (2023) examined the role of Big Five personality traits in the relationship between early traumatization and depressive symptoms among 3,176 young adults aged 20 to 25 years in Germany. Using data from the German National Cohort, the researchers employed structural equation modelling to investigate whether personality characteristics mediated the relationship between early trauma and depressive symptoms. The findings indicated that the Big Five personality traits partially mediated the relationship between early trauma and depressive symptoms, with neuroticism emerging as the most influential mediator. Although the study focused on early trauma generally rather than physical trauma alone, its findings strengthen the evidence that adverse childhood experiences are linked to personality characteristics, particularly neuroticism. The study is particularly relevant to the present research because it demonstrates the usefulness of the Big Five framework for understanding the psychological consequences associated with early trauma among young adults.

Shi et al. (2022) examined childhood trauma, neuroticism, social anxiety, and fear of missing out among 1,266 Chinese college students. The study found a positive association between childhood trauma and fear of missing out, while neuroticism and social anxiety independently mediated this relationship. A sequential pathway was also identified in which childhood trauma was associated with neuroticism, which was subsequently associated with social anxiety and ultimately fear of missing out. Although the outcome variable was not personality itself, the findings demonstrate that neuroticism may constitute an important psychological pathway linking childhood adversity with later social and behavioural outcomes among university students. This is relevant to the present study because it suggests that personality characteristics may represent an important link between adverse childhood experiences and how young people function within their social environments.

Verrastro et al. (2024) examined the relationship between childhood emotional abuse and workaholism among 1,176 young workers aged 18 to 25 years, focusing particularly on neuroticism and perfectionism as mediating factors. The study found significant direct and indirect pathways between childhood emotional abuse and workaholism, with neuroticism and perfectionism serving important mediating roles. The model was also found to be invariant across gender. While the study focused on emotional rather than physical trauma, its findings further support the broader proposition that childhood adversity may be associated with personality characteristics that subsequently influence behavioural functioning in young adulthood.

These studies indicate that childhood trauma is associated with important differences in personality-related characteristics, particularly neuroticism and extraversion. However, the available evidence provides less clarity regarding the specific contribution of childhood physical trauma to the different dimensions of the Big Five personality model. Furthermore, much of the evidence has been generated outside Nigeria, particularly in Europe and Asia. This limits the extent to which existing findings can be generalized to Nigerian university students whose developmental experiences occur within different cultural, social, and family contexts.

Childhood Emotional Trauma and Personality Profiles

Childhood emotional trauma is another important form of adverse childhood experience that may have implications for personality development. Unlike physical trauma, emotional abuse may occur through persistent criticism, humiliation, rejection, threats, or other forms of psychological invalidation. Such experiences may affect how children develop perceptions of themselves and others and may consequently be associated with characteristic patterns of emotional and interpersonal functioning.

Alnassar et al. (2024) examined the relationship between childhood trauma, personality development, and psychiatric symptoms in adulthood among 1,116 adults. The researchers assessed childhood trauma using the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire and personality using the Trait Self-Description Inventory. The findings showed that all forms of childhood trauma were positively correlated with neuroticism. More specifically, emotional abuse significantly predicted higher neuroticism, openness, and agreeableness. Emotional neglect was negatively associated with conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness. The study also found that emotional abuse was positively associated with depression and anxiety, while neuroticism partially mediated the relationship between emotional abuse and both depressive and anxiety symptoms. These findings provide particularly strong support for the relevance of emotional trauma to personality profiles because they demonstrate associations between specific forms of emotional adversity and several personality dimensions.

He et al. (2024) investigated the mediating roles of neuroticism and anxiety sensitivity in the relationship between childhood trauma and panic disorder severity. The study involved 84 individuals with panic disorder and 112 healthy controls. Childhood trauma was assessed using the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire, while neuroticism was measured using the Chinese Big Five Personality Inventory. Individuals with panic disorder reported significantly greater childhood trauma and neuroticism than healthy controls. Within the panic-disorder group, childhood trauma, anxiety sensitivity, neuroticism, and disorder severity were positively correlated. Mediation analyses further indicated that neuroticism and anxiety sensitivity mediated the relationship between childhood trauma and panic-disorder severity. Although the study was conducted in a clinical population and did not specifically examine emotional trauma alone, it provides evidence that neuroticism may constitute an important psychological mechanism through which childhood adversity is associated with later psychological functioning.

Koschig et al. (2023) similarly found that Big Five personality traits partially mediated the relationship between early traumatization and depressive symptoms among young adults. Neuroticism was identified as the most influential personality mediator. This finding is particularly relevant to emotional trauma because emotional adversity may increase vulnerability to negative emotional states and maladaptive responses to stress, characteristics that are closely reflected in the neuroticism dimension of the Big Five model. However, because the study examined early trauma as a broader construct, it does not establish whether emotional trauma has a stronger relationship with personality than physical trauma.

Verrastro et al. (2024) provided more specific evidence regarding emotional trauma by examining childhood emotional abuse among young workers. Their findings showed that emotional abuse was associated with workaholism through direct and indirect pathways involving neuroticism and perfectionism. The importance of neuroticism in this pathway suggests that emotional abuse may be associated with enduring tendencies toward emotional vulnerability and maladaptive behavioural patterns. The study is particularly relevant to the present research because it demonstrates that the consequences of emotional abuse may extend into young adulthood and may operate partly through personality characteristics.

Li et al. (2020) examined childhood emotional abuse and adult depression among 205 adults, focusing on the mediating role of mentalizing incapacity. The findings showed that childhood emotional abuse remained significantly associated with adult depression after controlling for other forms of childhood maltreatment. Hypermentalizing and hypomentalizing partially mediated this association. Although personality was not the principal outcome of the study, the findings are relevant because they demonstrate that emotional abuse may have enduring effects on psychological processes involved in interpreting oneself and others. These processes may be relevant to the development of interpersonal and emotional characteristics captured within broader personality frameworks.

Wang et al. (2018), in their study of Chinese university students, also found that students with histories of childhood trauma exhibited significantly higher neuroticism and psychoticism and lower extraversion. They also reported greater depression, anxiety, and dysfunctional attitudes and lower social support. The findings suggest that exposure to childhood adversity among university students may be associated with both personality-related characteristics and broader psychological functioning. However, the cross-sectional nature of the study limits conclusions about the direction of the relationship between childhood trauma and personality.

Sampasa-Kanyinga et al. (2018) examined child abuse and work-related stress among 14,581 employed adults using nationally representative Canadian data. Child abuse was significantly associated with greater work stress, job dissatisfaction, job insecurity, and lower perceived workplace support. Although the study did not directly measure Big Five personality traits, its findings demonstrate that the consequences of childhood abuse may extend into adult occupational functioning. The study therefore provides contextual evidence for the broader long-term significance of childhood adversity, although it offers limited direct evidence regarding the relationship between emotional trauma and personality profiles.

Overall, the reviewed evidence suggests a recurring relationship between childhood emotional adversity and personality characteristics, with neuroticism emerging particularly consistently across studies. Emotional abuse and neglect have also been associated with differences in conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and openness. Nevertheless, considerable gaps remain. Many studies have examined childhood trauma as a composite construct rather than distinguishing emotional trauma from physical trauma. Others have focused on psychiatric symptoms or behavioural outcomes, using personality only as a mediator or explanatory variable. In addition, much of the available evidence comes from populations in Europe, Asia, and North America, with limited evidence from Nigerian university settings.

METHODS

Study Design and Setting

A cross-sectional survey design was adopted to examine the association between childhood physical and emotional trauma and personality profiles among undergraduate students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria.

Participants and Sampling

The study population comprised undergraduate students enrolled in full-time and part-time programmes at Nasarawa State University, Keffi. The university population was estimated at 35,000 students, from which a sample of 395 students was selected using stratified random sampling. Faculties constituted the sampling strata, and participants were subsequently selected through simple random sampling within the strata.

Measures

Childhood Trauma

Childhood physical and emotional trauma was assessed using relevant subscales of the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire-Short Form (CTQ-SF) developed by Bernstein et al. (1998). The CTQ-SF is a 28-item self-report instrument assessing emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional neglect, and physical neglect on a five-point response scale ranging from 1 (never true) to 5 (very often true). In the present study, the sexual abuse and minimization/denial items were excluded because they were outside the scope of the study. The retained 19 items assessed emotional abuse, physical abuse, emotional neglect, and physical neglect.

An Emotional Trauma Index was derived from the emotional abuse and emotional neglect subscales, while a Physical Trauma Index was derived from the physical abuse and physical neglect subscales. Higher scores indicated greater exposure to the respective forms of childhood trauma. In the present sample, the Emotional Trauma Index demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .88$), as did the Physical Trauma Index ($\alpha = .86$). Reliability coefficients for the individual subscales ranged from .76 to .84.

Personality Profiles

Personality was assessed using the 30-item Big Five Inventory-2 Short Form (BFI-2-S) developed by Soto and John (2017). The instrument assesses five personality domains: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Negative Emotionality (Neuroticism), and Open-Mindedness (Openness to Experience). Items are rated on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). The instrument was adopted from a

Nigerian study by Bademos et al. (2025) and reviewed by two psychologists for clarity, relevance, and cultural appropriateness. In the present study, the five dimensions demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .78 to .82.

Procedure

Ethical and institutional approval was obtained before data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw without penalty. Questionnaires were administered to eligible students across the selected faculties. No identifying information was collected, and participants were debriefed following completion of the study.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 23. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize participants' demographic characteristics and study variables. Inferential analyses were conducted to examine the associations between childhood physical and emotional trauma and the five personality dimensions. Statistical significance was evaluated at the 0.05 level.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study, and the data were used solely for research purposes.

RESULTS

Participant Characteristics

A total of 395 undergraduate students participated in the study. Of these, 209 (52.9%) were male and 186 (47.1%) were female. Participants aged 16–25 years constituted 40.5% ($n = 160$) of the sample, those aged 26–35 years accounted for 31.6% ($n = 125$), while 27.8% ($n = 110$) were aged 36 years and above. Regarding academic level, 119 (30.1%) participants were in 100 level, 156 (39.5%) were in 200 level, and 120 (30.4%) were in 300 level.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 395)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	209	52.9
	Female	186	47.1
	Total	395	100.0
Age	16–25 years	160	40.5
	26–35 years	125	31.6
	36 years and above	110	27.8
	Total	395	100.0
Level	100 Level	119	30.1
	200 Level	156	39.5
	300 Level	120	30.4
	Total	395	100.0

Childhood Physical Trauma and Personality Profiles

The first hypothesis examined whether childhood physical trauma was significantly associated with the personality profile of students. The multivariate analysis indicated a significant effect of physical trauma on the combined personality dimensions, Wilks' $\Lambda = .079$, $F(105, 1808.94) = 11.75$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .399$.

Follow-up univariate analyses indicated significant effects of physical trauma on Extraversion, $F = 8.19$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .316$; Agreeableness, $F = 1.66$, $p = .035$, partial $\eta^2 = .086$; Conscientiousness, $F = 8.34$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .316$.

.001, partial $\eta^2 = .320$; Neuroticism, $F = 1.89$, $p = .011$, partial $\eta^2 = .096$; and Openness, $F = 55.67$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .758$. The largest effect was observed for Openness, followed by Conscientiousness and Extraversion. These findings provide support for the first hypothesis.

Table 2: Multivariate Test of the Influence of Childhood Physical Trauma on Personality Profiles among Students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

Effect	Wilks' Lambda	F	df	Sig.	Partial η^2
Physical Trauma	0.079	11.75	105, 1808.94	< .001	0.399

Table 3: Univariate Effects of Childhood Physical Trauma on Personality Profiles (N = 395)

Personality Trait	F	Sig.	Partial η^2	Effect Size Interpretation
Extraversion	8.19	< .001	0.316	Large
Agreeableness	1.66	.035	0.086	Small
Conscientiousness	8.34	< .001	0.320	Large
Neuroticism	1.89	.011	0.096	Small
Openness	55.67	< .001	0.758	Very Large

Childhood Emotional Trauma and Personality Profiles

The second hypothesis examined whether childhood emotional trauma was significantly associated with students' personality profiles. The multivariate analysis revealed a significant effect of emotional trauma on the combined personality dimensions, Wilks' $\Lambda = .032$, $F(70, 1794.21) = 27.05$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .496$.

Univariate analyses showed significant effects of emotional trauma on Extraversion, $F = 3.58$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .117$; Conscientiousness, $F = 9.48$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .259$; Neuroticism, $F = 331.23$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .924$; and Openness, $F = 1.81$, $p = .035$, partial $\eta^2 = .063$. The effect on Agreeableness was not statistically significant, $F = 1.38$, $p = .161$, partial $\eta^2 = .048$. The strongest association was observed for Neuroticism. These findings provide support for the second hypothesis.

Table 4: Multivariate Test of the Influence of Childhood Emotional Trauma on Personality profiles among Students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

Effect	Wilks' Lambda	F	df	Sig.	Partial η^2
Emotional Trauma	0.032	27.046	70, 1794.206	.000	0.496

Table 5: Univariate Effects of Childhood Emotional Trauma on Personality Traits (N = 395)

Personality Trait	F	Sig.	Partial η^2	Effect Size Interpretation
Extraversion	3.58	< .001	.117	Moderate
Agreeableness	1.38	.161	.048	Not Significant
Conscientiousness	9.48	< .001	.259	Large
Neuroticism	331.23	< .001	.924	Extremely Large
Openness	1.81	.035	.063	Small

Joint Association of Childhood Physical and Emotional Trauma with Personality Profiles

The third hypothesis examined the joint contribution of childhood physical and emotional trauma to students' personality profiles. The multivariate analysis indicated significant effects for both physical trauma, Wilks' $\Lambda = .129$, $F(5, 388) = 523.63$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .871$, and emotional trauma, Wilks' $\Lambda = .042$, $F(5, 388) = 1766.74$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .958$.

Follow-up analyses showed that physical trauma was significantly associated with Extraversion, $F = 173.03$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .306$; Conscientiousness, $F = 148.23$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .274$; Neuroticism, $F = 31.56$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .958$.

.001, partial $\eta^2 = .075$; and Openness, $F = 1250.83$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .761$. Its association with Agreeableness was not significant, $F = .01$, $p = .919$, partial $\eta^2 < .001$.

Emotional trauma was significantly associated with Extraversion, $F = 38.98$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .090$; Conscientiousness, $F = 108.83$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .217$; Neuroticism, $F = 4974.30$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .927$; and Openness, $F = 89.63$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .186$. The association with Agreeableness was not significant, $F = 1.56$, $p = .213$, partial $\eta^2 = .004$.

Overall, the findings indicate significant multivariate associations between both forms of childhood trauma and the personality profile of the students, with Neuroticism showing the strongest association with emotional trauma and Openness showing the strongest association with physical trauma.

Table.6: Multivariate Tests of the Joint Influence of Physical and Emotional Trauma on Personality Traits

Effect	Wilks' Lambda	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Physical Trauma	.129	523.630	5	388	.000	.871
Emotional Trauma						

Table.7: Univariate Effects of Physical Trauma on Personality Traits

Dependent Variable	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Extraversion	173.026	.000	.306
Agreeableness	.010	.919	.000
Conscientiousness	148.234	.000	.274
Neuroticism	31.558	.000	.075
Openness	1250.825	.000	.761

Table 8: Univariate Effects of Emotional Trauma on Personality Traits

Dependent Variable	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Extraversion	38.981	.000	.090
Agreeableness	1.557	.213	.004
Conscientiousness	108.826	.000	.217
Neuroticism	4974.297	.000	.927
Openness	89.629	.000	.186

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section presents the discussion of findings derived from the hypotheses tested in the study. The results are interpreted in light of existing empirical evidence and the guiding theoretical frameworks are based on two distinct but interrelated theories: attachment theory and the factor model (also known as the Big Five personality theory).. These theories provide a useful lens for understanding.

Hypothesis one stated that childhood physical trauma would significantly influence personality profiles among students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi. The findings of the study supported this hypothesis. The results revealed that childhood physical trauma had a significant multivariate influence on personality traits. Specifically, physical trauma significantly predicted extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness, with particularly strong effects observed for openness, conscientiousness, and extraversion. This indicates that early experiences of physical abuse or neglect are associated with measurable variations across multiple dimensions of personality among university students. These findings are consistent with attachment theory as proposed by Bowlby (1969) and later expanded by Ainsworth (2015). Attachment theory posits that early caregiver relationships form internal working models that shape emotional regulation,

interpersonal trust, and behavioral tendencies throughout life. When children experience physical abuse or neglect, the secure base necessary for healthy exploration and emotional development is disrupted. Such disruptions may foster maladaptive coping patterns, heightened emotional reactivity, or withdrawal, which can manifest in adulthood as elevated neuroticism, reduced agreeableness, or altered openness to experience. The present findings therefore support the theoretical assumption that early trauma can recalibrate personality development trajectories. The results also align with the Five-Factor Model, which conceptualizes personality as comprising relatively stable traits shaped by both biological and environmental influences. Physical trauma represents a significant environmental stressor capable of influencing these trait dimensions. The observed association between physical trauma and neuroticism is particularly consistent with existing literature suggesting that traumatic experiences increase emotional instability and vulnerability to stress. Similarly, the influence on conscientiousness may reflect the impact of early instability on self-regulation, planning, and persistence. The strong association with openness may suggest complex adaptive processes, where some individuals exposed to trauma develop heightened introspection or altered cognitive-emotional processing patterns. Empirically, these findings correspond with several reviewed studies. Beilharz et al. found that childhood trauma, including physical abuse, was significantly associated with long-term psychological distress and physiological dysregulation, supporting the idea that early trauma exerts enduring effects on functioning. Similarly, Koschig et al. reported that early traumatization influenced depressive symptoms through personality traits, particularly neuroticism. The present study extends these findings to a Nigerian undergraduate population by demonstrating that physical trauma influences not only emotional instability but a broader range of personality dimensions. Although Verrastro et al. focused on childhood emotional abuse, their findings that early trauma operates through personality characteristics such as neuroticism further support the broader conclusion that trauma alters personality structures in young adulthood. Likewise, Shi et al. demonstrated that childhood trauma predicted maladaptive social behaviours through neuroticism and social anxiety, reinforcing the idea that early adversity reshapes personality-linked emotional processes.

Within the Nigerian context, these findings are particularly meaningful. Many undergraduates face socio-economic stressors, family instability, and communal caregiving dynamics that differ from Western samples. Attachment relationships may extend beyond biological parents to extended family members. However, when physical abuse or neglect occurs within these caregiving systems, it may undermine trust, emotional security, and self-concept, thereby shaping enduring personality tendencies. This supports the cultural applicability of attachment theory while acknowledging contextual complexities. Despite these supportive findings, caution is necessary. Attachment theory has been criticised for overstating early determinism. Not all individuals exposed to physical trauma develop maladaptive personality traits. Protective factors such as supportive peers, mentors, or religious and community networks may buffer negative outcomes. Additionally, while the Five-Factor Model provides a structured measurement framework, it does not fully explain the developmental mechanisms through which trauma translates into personality change. Therefore, the present findings should be interpreted as demonstrating association rather than deterministic causation. Overall, the findings of Hypothesis One provide strong evidence that childhood physical trauma significantly influences personality profiles among students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi. The results reinforce both attachment theory and the Five-Factor Model by demonstrating that adverse early caregiving experiences are linked to enduring personality differences in young adulthood. They also contribute to the growing body of trauma research within African university populations, highlighting the importance of trauma-informed psychological support services in higher education settings.

Hypothesis two stated that childhood emotional trauma would significantly influence personality profiles among students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi. The findings of the study supported this hypothesis. The results indicated that childhood emotional trauma had a significant multivariate influence on personality traits. Specifically, emotional trauma significantly predicted extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness, while it did not significantly predict agreeableness. Among these traits, neuroticism emerged as the most strongly influenced dimension, suggesting that emotional trauma is particularly associated with emotional instability and vulnerability to stress. These findings are strongly consistent with attachment theory. Attachment theory posits that early emotional experiences with caregivers form internal working models that guide emotional regulation, interpersonal expectations, and behavioural responses throughout life. Emotional trauma, including emotional abuse and neglect, directly undermines a child's sense of security, validation, and emotional safety. When caregivers respond with hostility, rejection, or indifference, children may internalise negative beliefs about

themselves and others, leading to heightened emotional reactivity, anxiety, and difficulties in stress management. The strong association observed between emotional trauma and neuroticism aligns closely with this theoretical framework, as neuroticism reflects tendencies toward anxiety, mood instability, and heightened sensitivity to threat. The findings also align with the Five-Factor Model, which acknowledges that environmental stressors such as trauma can shape personality development. Emotional trauma represents a chronic psychological stressor that may influence enduring trait patterns. The strong predictive relationship between emotional trauma and neuroticism is particularly consistent with the broader trauma literature, which frequently identifies neuroticism as a central personality vulnerability following adverse childhood experiences. The influence on conscientiousness and extraversion further suggests that emotional trauma may affect self-discipline, motivation, social engagement, and assertiveness. Reduced emotional security during development may limit the formation of adaptive coping strategies, thereby influencing behavioural consistency and interpersonal functioning. Empirical evidence reviewed in this study strongly supports these findings. He et al. demonstrated that childhood trauma influenced panic disorder severity through neuroticism and anxiety sensitivity, highlighting the mediating role of personality in trauma-related psychopathology. Similarly, Alnassar et al. found that emotional abuse significantly predicted higher neuroticism and was linked to depressive and anxiety symptoms, with neuroticism partially mediating these relationships. These studies reinforce the conclusion that emotional trauma contributes to personality vulnerabilities that increase psychological risk in adulthood. The findings are also consistent with Li et al., who reported that childhood emotional abuse significantly predicted adult depression, partly through deficits in mentalizing processes. Emotional trauma disrupts the development of healthy emotional understanding and self-reflection, which may contribute to the elevated neuroticism observed in the present study. In addition, Wang et al. found that university students with histories of childhood trauma exhibited higher neuroticism and lower extraversion, alongside greater psychological distress. This parallels the current findings within a university context and suggests that the impact of emotional trauma on personality is not limited to Western samples. Furthermore, although Sampasa-Kanying et al. focused on occupational stress outcomes, their findings demonstrate the long-term psychosocial consequences of child abuse, extending into adult work environments. This supports the broader conclusion that emotional trauma has enduring effects on functioning beyond childhood and adolescence. Within the Nigerian university context, these findings are particularly significant. Emotional trauma may occur in environments characterised by harsh disciplinary practices, family instability, poverty, or emotional neglect. In collectivist societies where emotional expression may be shaped by cultural expectations, the internalisation of emotional distress may be especially pronounced. Students exposed to emotional trauma may therefore display elevated neuroticism, reduced emotional stability, and difficulties in academic resilience or peer relationships. These patterns highlight the importance of trauma-informed counselling services within Nigerian universities. Despite these strong associations, it is important to acknowledge theoretical limitations. Attachment theory has been criticised for potentially overstating the influence of early experiences while underestimating later environmental influences such as peer support, religious engagement, and educational opportunities. Similarly, the Five-Factor Model categorises personality traits but does not fully explain the developmental mechanisms through which emotional trauma produces long-term trait changes. Therefore, while the present findings demonstrate significant associations, they should not be interpreted as evidence of deterministic outcomes. Overall, the results of Hypothesis Two provide substantial evidence that childhood emotional trauma significantly influences personality profiles among students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi. The particularly strong association with neuroticism reinforces both attachment theory and the Five-Factor Model, while also contributing valuable data from a Nigerian undergraduate population. These findings underscore the psychological importance of early emotional caregiving environments and highlight the need for preventive and therapeutic interventions aimed at mitigating the long-term personality vulnerabilities associated with emotional trauma.

Hypothesis three stated that childhood physical and childhood emotional trauma would jointly and significantly influence personality profiles among students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi. The findings supported this hypothesis. The results revealed that both physical and emotional trauma had significant multivariate effects on personality traits when examined simultaneously. Further analyses indicated that both forms of trauma significantly predicted extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness, while neither significantly predicted agreeableness. These findings suggest that exposure to multiple forms of childhood trauma exerts a broad and enduring influence on personality development. The joint significance of both trauma types strengthens the explanatory value of attachment theory. According to Bowlby's (1969) framework, repeated

disruptions in caregiving relationships, whether through physical harm or emotional maltreatment, interfere with the formation of secure attachment bonds. Physical trauma may undermine a child's sense of physical safety, while emotional trauma compromises emotional validation and trust. When both forms occur, the internal working models that guide personality development may become deeply shaped by insecurity, hypervigilance, or withdrawal. The strong influence on neuroticism observed in this study aligns with the expectation that children exposed to cumulative trauma may develop heightened emotional instability and sensitivity to stress. The findings are also consistent with the assumptions of the Five-Factor Model. The model acknowledges that environmental stressors such as trauma interact with biological predispositions to shape enduring personality traits. The fact that both physical and emotional trauma significantly predicted multiple personality dimensions suggests that adverse childhood experiences do not operate in isolation. Rather, they collectively shape patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving. The influence on conscientiousness may reflect disruptions in self-regulation and goal-directed behaviour, while the association with extraversion may indicate alterations in social engagement and trust. The consistent non-significant findings for agreeableness may suggest that certain interpersonal tendencies are more resilient or influenced by broader socialisation factors beyond trauma exposure. The present findings are supported by Koschig et al., who demonstrated that early traumatization influenced psychological outcomes through the mediating role of Big Five personality traits, particularly neuroticism. Their study highlighted that trauma exposure affects multiple trait dimensions simultaneously, rather than targeting a single personality outcome. This aligns with the current study's finding that both physical and emotional trauma jointly predict a broad personality profile among university students. Similarly, Alnassar et al. reported that different forms of childhood trauma were associated with variations across several Big Five traits, including neuroticism, openness, and conscientiousness. Their regression analyses showed that emotional abuse and neglect influenced multiple personality dimensions rather than producing isolated effects. This supports the present finding that trauma subtypes collectively shape personality structures in adulthood. Additional support can be drawn from Wang et al., who found that students exposed to childhood trauma exhibited higher neuroticism and lower extraversion compared to non-traumatized peers. Although their study did not simultaneously examine both physical and emotional trauma in a joint multivariate framework, the pattern of findings suggests cumulative trauma effects on personality functioning. Likewise, Beilharz et al. reported that trauma subtypes, including physical abuse and emotional neglect, were linked to enduring psychological and physiological dysregulation, reinforcing the idea that multiple forms of trauma can produce broad developmental consequences. Within the Nigerian university context, the joint influence of physical and emotional trauma is particularly important. Students may experience overlapping adversities within family systems characterised by economic hardship, harsh disciplinary practices, or emotional deprivation. When both physical and emotional trauma are present, their combined effect may intensify emotional instability and disrupt adaptive personality development. This may manifest in heightened neuroticism, fluctuating motivation, and altered social functioning in academic environments. Despite these significant findings, it is important to avoid deterministic interpretations. Not all individuals exposed to multiple forms of trauma develop maladaptive personality patterns. Protective factors such as supportive extended family members, religious involvement, peer networks, and institutional support may moderate these outcomes. Furthermore, while the Five-Factor Model provides a reliable measurement structure, it does not fully explain the developmental pathways through which trauma translates into personality traits. Attachment theory offers a developmental mechanism, yet it may understate later environmental influences. Overall, the findings of Hypothesis Three provide strong empirical evidence that childhood physical and emotional trauma jointly and significantly influence personality profiles among students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi. The results reinforce both attachment theory and the Five-Factor Model by demonstrating that cumulative early adversity is associated with broad personality variations in young adulthood. These findings highlight the importance of integrated trauma-informed interventions within university settings to address the long-term developmental consequences of childhood maltreatment.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusion and recommendations are made:

1. **University counselling services should adopt trauma-informed approaches** to assessment and intervention, with psychologists and counsellors adequately trained to recognise the potential long-term psychological effects of childhood physical and emotional trauma.

2. **Early psychological screening should be considered during student orientation**, particularly to identify students who may have significant histories of childhood trauma and facilitate appropriate referral and support.
3. Student development programmes should incorporate resilience-building, emotional regulation, and stress-management interventions to strengthen students' adaptive coping skills and psychological well-being.
4. Mental health and trauma-awareness programmes should be integrated into relevant university courses and seminars to improve students' psychological literacy and promote healthy coping strategies.
5. Peer-support and mentoring programmes should be strengthened to provide students with safe and supportive environments for developing healthy interpersonal relationships and accessing appropriate support.
6. Parents and caregivers should be sensitised to the potential long-term consequences of physical and emotional maltreatment, with emphasis on positive, non-violent approaches to child discipline and emotional support.
7. Future research should examine potential protective and moderating factors, including social support, coping strategies, socioeconomic status, and gender, to provide a clearer understanding of resilience following childhood trauma.
8. Longitudinal studies should be encouraged to examine how childhood physical and emotional trauma relates to personality development across different stages of life and to provide stronger evidence regarding the temporal nature of these associations.

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