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# The effect of selectors' neuroticism on job application outcomes

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## Abstract

This study set out to understand whether highly neurotic people's evaluation of job candidates' suitability differed from those who were low on this personality dimension. One hundred and sixty-five undergraduate students completed the neuroticism subscale of the Eysenck personality questionnaire, and from this sample thirty-eight participants were then selected to take part in the experimental stage. The students were shown a video film displaying three job candidates (qualified, unqualified or ambiguously qualified) applying for a student-counseling job. They were then asked to evaluate the candidates on a number of aspects. The results showed that high-neurotic participants negatively and significantly differed from their low neurotic counterparts in their evaluation of the qualified candidate. Those in the high-neurotic group were also much more negative in their judgment of the hireability of the qualified candidate. These findings highlight the importance of selectors' personality in the selection of personnel.

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*Keywords:* Neuroticism; Employment interview; Selectors' personality; Job candidates; Selection

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## 1. Introduction

In the employment interview literature, many influences have been studied on the evaluation process of personnel selection, ranging from interviewers' moods to applicants' appearance (e.g., Baron, 1993; Pingitore, Dugoni, Tindale, & Spring, 1994). The influence of the selectors' personality in personnel decision-making however, has not been adequately explored. Selectors' neuroticism must surely be prominent amongst these personality factors. With this in mind, this study investigates whether significant differences emerge in the personnel decision making of highly neurotic and low neurotic personalities.

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Indeed, neuroticism is one of the main personality dimensions highlighted in several important taxonomies of personality (e.g., Eysenck, Barrett, Wilson, & Jackson, 1992; Costa & McCrae, 1995). According to Costa and McCrae (1987, p. 301) neuroticism may be defined as a “. . .broad dimension of individual differences in the tendency to experience negative, distressing emotions and to possess associated behavioral and cognitive traits.” There are research findings highlighting the negative viewpoint of the highly neurotic personality. For instance, high levels of neuroticism whether dependent (Mayo, 1989) or independent of mood state (Ruiz-Caballero & Bermudez, 1995) might increase the relative accessibility and retrieval of negative information. Neurotics were also reported to experience higher levels of negative life events (Magnus, Diener, Fujita, & Pavot, 1993), interpersonal conflicts, hostile reaction (Gunthert, Cohen, & Armeli, 1999), and hopelessness (Velting, 1999).

There are a few studies investigating the raters' personality in relation to their appraisal of others (e.g., Kowner & Ogawa, 1995; Jawahar, 2001). However, none of these has examined the role of neuroticism in particular. On the other hand, the effect of positive affect on job interview outcomes has been studied more frequently (Isen & Baron, 1991). These studies mainly showed that positive feelings might contribute positively to the evaluation process and promote a positive bias or halo under certain conditions. In a study by Baron (cited in Isen & Baron, 1991) it was found that when the candidate's qualifications for the job were ambiguous, the influence of positive affect was maximal.

In this study, neuroticism of the selectors will be examined in relation to the evaluation and selection of three different job candidates (e.g., qualified, unqualified or ambiguously qualified for the job). Based on the literature review about the negative viewpoint of neurotics, it is expected that people high in neuroticism might differ negatively from their low neurotic counterparts in their evaluation and selection decisions. The study will explore how these differences will take place in relation to the different qualification levels possessed by job candidates. The study will also examine the differences between males and females in relation to the hiring decision and evaluation of candidates. In one reported study, female interviewers rated all applicants higher than did male interviewers (London & Poplawski, 1976). In some other studies, however, no differences were recorded for males and females (e.g., Elliot, 1981). As there are inconsistencies in the results of the previous studies, an expectation is not suggested with respect to the differences between females and males.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1. Sample*

One hundred and sixty-five (95 females and 70 males) volunteer second, third and fourth year undergraduate students at the Faculty of Letters of Istanbul University filled out the neuroticism subscale of the EPQ. For the present study, the mean and standard deviation values were found to be 11.63 and 4.50 for female participants. The corresponding values for males were 9.60 and 5.19 respectively. The participants who scored one standard deviation above/below the mean of their respective gender group were considered as high-neurotic/low-neurotic. Using this criterion, 14 females and 6 males were chosen as low neurotic, and 13 females and 7 males were selected as the

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