

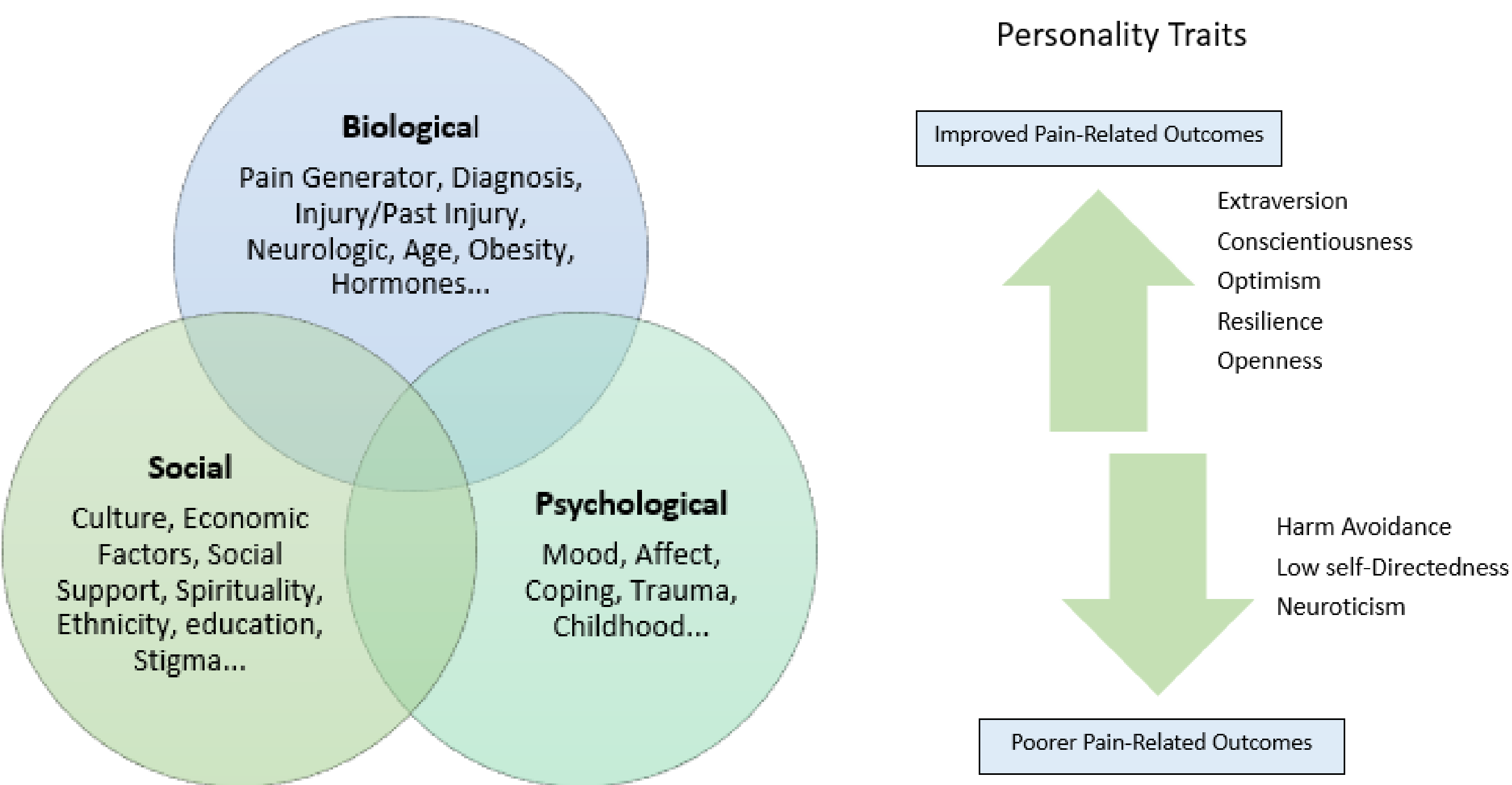
Perfectionism and Chronic Pain: A Scoping Review

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CHRONIC PAIN—A Complex Phenomenon

“Pain that persists beyond normal tissue healing time”



PERFECTIONISM—A Personality Trait

“Striving for flawlessness, setting excessively high standards, and being overly critical, with concerns about mistakes and others’ perceptions”

Once considered unidimensional, it is now recognized as multidimensional, with various models and scales used in research.

- ### Perfectionism & Chronis Illness
- . Perfectionism contributes to the development and persistence of chronic conditions by amplifying stress and promoting maladaptive coping.
 - . It is associated with worse outcomes across several chronic illnesses, including greater tinnitus distress, higher depression and anxiety, poorer health in chronic fatigue syndrome, and increased sickness impact in Crohn’s disease and ulcerative colitis.

Aim of Scoping Review

Given the complexity of chronic pain and the multidimensional impact of perfectionism across chronic conditions, the aim of this scoping review was to synthesize the existing literature on the relationship between perfectionism and chronic pain, focusing on potential implications for pain management interventions.

Overview of Studies

PubMed, CINAHL, APA PsycInfo & Scopus

18 studies included in review

94% of studies published in the last 20 years; over **60% since 2020**, reflecting growing interest in this area

Studies were conducted across 9 countries, with two-thirds (12 out of 18) originating from North America and Western Europe



Populations Studied

Adults (12) - Adolescents (7) - Children (14)

Pain Conditions Addressed

Low back pain (1)
Migraine/Chronic headache (2)
Temporomandibular disorder pain (1)
Fibromyalgia (4)

Pain in the context of chronic fatigue syndrome (1)
Pain related to peptic ulcer disease (1)
Genito-pelvic pain following cesarean section (1)
Chronic non cancer pain, not-diagnosis specific (9)

Results

15 studies reported a general **association between higher levels of perfectionism and adverse pain-related outcomes**: Increased pain intensity, more frequent episodes, longer pain duration, greater pain-related fear, catastrophizing, and emotional distress, Higher levels of somatization, fatigue, and sleep disturbances, Reduced self-efficacy, greater activity avoidance, and disruptions in daily functioning, contributing to functional impairment and disability

3 studies reported a **complex relationship between perfectionism and outcomes following pain management interventions**: Perfectionism generally acted as a **negative predictor**. However, certain dimensions or levels occasionally had positive effects in specific contexts.

- ### Implications
- #### RESEARCH
- . Future studies should use longitudinal and RCT designs to clarify the causal link between perfectionism and chronic pain.
 - . Both adaptive and maladaptive dimensions should be examined to guide strategies that enhance helpful traits and reduce harmful ones.
 - . The effectiveness of CBT and ACT in this context should be evaluated, focusing on mediators like coping, perceived control, and psychological flexibility.
 - . Research should also determine whether targeting perfectionism improves outcomes beyond standard care.

- #### CLINICAL
- . Assessing perfectionism may improve chronic pain evaluations due to its link with fear, catastrophizing, and impairment.
 - . In pediatric cases, addressing both youth and parent perfectionism may boost adherence and recovery.
 - . Condition-specific approaches can address related anxiety, overactivity, and sleep issues.
 - . Early screening in at-risk groups (e.g., adolescents, postpartum women, students) may prevent pain progression.