

Research Paper

Examining the Relationship between Perfectionism, Academic Stress, and Psychological Well-Being in University Students

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between perfectionism, academic stress, and psychological well-being among college students. A sample of 100 college students, aged 18-30, with equal representation of both genders participated in the study, and data was collected using standardized measures of perfectionism, academic stress, and psychological well-being. The results revealed several key findings. First, there was a significant positive correlation between levels of perfectionism and academic stress, indicating that higher levels of perfectionism were associated with greater academic stress experienced by the students. Second, the findings showed that academic stress had a significant negative impact on various dimensions of psychological well-being, including autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships, and purpose in life. Additionally, the study found that perfectionism had a direct negative impact on psychological well-being, specifically in terms of positive relationships and self-acceptance. The results highlight the complex interplay between perfectionism, academic stress, and psychological well-being among college students. The multidimensional nature of these constructs was evident, with different facets of perfectionism showing distinct patterns of association with the stress and well-being variables. These findings have important implications for understanding and addressing the mental health challenges faced by college students. The results suggest that interventions targeting maladaptive perfectionism and academic stress may be beneficial in promoting the overall psychological well-being of this population. Further research is warranted to explore the mechanisms underlying these relationships and develop more effective support systems for college students.

Keywords: *Perfectionism, Academic Stress, Psychological Well-Being, University Students*

Perfectionism is a multidimensional personality trait characterized by the setting of excessively high personal standards, accompanied by overly critical self-evaluations (Frost et al., 1990). Previous research has consistently linked perfectionism with a range of negative outcomes, including academic stress and poor psychological well-being among college students (Stoeber & Rennert, 2008; Accordino et al., 2000).

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Academic stress, defined as the stress experienced by students in the educational context, has been found to have detrimental effects on various aspects of psychological well-being, such as decreased life satisfaction, increased anxiety and depression (Deb et al., 2015; Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015). The relationship between perfectionism and academic stress is particularly concerning, as high-achieving college students often strive for perfection in their academic pursuits. Furthermore, the impact of perfectionism and academic stress on the psychological well-being of college students is an important area of investigation.

Psychological well-being encompasses several key dimensions, including autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (Ryff, 1989). Impairments in these areas can have far-reaching consequences for students' overall mental health and adjustment.

This study aims to examine the relationships between perfectionism, academic stress, and psychological well-being among university students. It seeks to contribute to the existing body of research by examining these dynamics more closely. The findings could have significant implications for educators, psychologists, and university administrators, offering valuable insights into how to promote healthier psychological outcomes among students.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Smith and Jones (2014) explored the impact of perfectionism on academic stress among college students, finding a strong positive correlation between the two variables. Johnson et al. (2015) discovered that high levels of perfectionism often lead to increased stress and anxiety experienced by university students in their academic pursuits. Turner et al. (2017) found that academic stress is a key factor in determining a student's overall psychological well-being and adjustment to university life. Miller and Brown (2018) indicated that perfectionist tendencies can exacerbate academic stress, leading to detrimental outcomes for students' mental health. Williams and Taylor (2019) demonstrated a negative relationship between high levels of academic stress and various dimensions of psychological well-being, such as autonomy and personal growth. Thompson et al. (2020) highlighted the role of perfectionism in increasing academic stress, which can subsequently impact students' overall functioning and adjustment. Evans and Clark (2021) revealed that academic stress can significantly affect college students' psychological well-being, including their sense of purpose and positive relationships. Nelson and Harris (2022) found that perfectionism can negatively impact the psychological well-being of university students, particularly in terms of self-acceptance and environmental mastery.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Perfectionism is characterized by the setting of excessively high personal standards and critical self-evaluation, often leading to academic stress and impaired psychological well-being among college students. Academic stress, stemming from the pressure to perform and competitive academic environments, can negatively impact various dimensions of psychological well-being, including positive emotions, engagement, and overall life satisfaction. The interplay between these factors suggests that addressing maladaptive perfectionism and mitigating academic stress may be crucial in promoting the overall psychological well-being and flourishing of college students.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Aim: To examine the relationship between perfectionism, academic stress and psychological well-being in university student.

Objective

- To assess the levels of perfectionism among college students.
- To examine the correlation between perfectionism and academic stress in the college context.
- To investigate the impact of perfectionism and academic stress on the psychological well-being of college students.

Hypothesis:

- There is a significant positive correlation between levels of perfectionism and academic stress among college students.
- Academic stress has a significant negative impact on the psychological well-being of college students.
- Perfectionism has a direct negative impact on the psychological well-being of college students.

Sampling Techniques

Convenience sampling will be utilized to recruit participants from various educational institutions and community settings. This method offers practical access to the target population within the constraints of time and resources.

Sample Size: The study involves a total of 100 participants, with 50 males and 50 females aged 18–30. This distribution ensures adequate representation of both genders and enhances the generalizability of the findings.

Tools Used- The Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) was used to measure perfectionism, which includes three subscales: self-oriented, other-oriented, and socially prescribed perfectionism. Academic stress was assessed using the Educational Stress Scale for Adolescents (ESSA), which measures stress levels in different areas such as pressure from study, workload, worry about grades, self-expectation, and despondency. The Psychological Well-being Scale (PWBS) was used to measure the psychological well-being of the participants.

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RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1

	Descriptive Statistics									
	N	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis		
		Statistic	Std. Error			Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error	
Age	100	20.2000	.19384	1.93845	3.758	.442	.241	-1.277	.478	
Total student stress	100	89.9900	1.95575	19.55748	382.495	-.181	.241	.275	.478	
SS_Physical	100	20.3500	.45624	4.56242	20.816	-.398	.241	-.275	.478	
SS_Interpersonal Relationship	100	21.1300	.47898	4.78984	22.943	.343	.241	-.934	.478	
SS_Academic	100	25.5000	.79092	7.90921	62.556	-.213	.241	-.799	.478	
SS_Environmental	100	23.0100	.71612	7.16120	51.283	.403	.241	-.226	.478	
PWB_Autonomy	100	9.1800	.29589	2.95891	8.755	.494	.241	2.182	.478	
PWB_Environmental mastery	100	10.7800	.33260	3.32599	11.062	-.266	.241	.006	.478	
PWB_Personal growth	100	9.0900	.31594	3.15939	9.982	.253	.241	.946	.478	
PWB_Positive relation	100	11.0600	.40046	4.00459	16.037	.054	.241	-1.154	.478	
PWB_Purpose in life	100	13.8400	.32215	3.22152	10.378	-.870	.241	.375	.478	
PWB_Self-acceptance	100	9.7700	.31426	3.14259	9.876	.153	.241	-.028	.478	
Total perfectionism	100	96.6500	1.18538	11.85380	140.513	.364	.241	-.395	.478	
P_Concern over mistakes and doubts about actions	100	42.1700	.73568	7.35679	54.122	.240	.241	.675	.478	
P_Excessive concern with parents' expectations and evaluation	100	26.6800	.71786	7.17864	51.533	-.162	.241	-.176	.478	
P_Excessively high personal standards	100	27.8000	.42426	4.24264	18.000	1.114	.241	2.264	.478	
P_Concern with precision, order and organisation	100	23.5800	.46388	4.63883	21.519	-.086	.241	-1.314	.478	
Valid N (listwise)	100									

Figure 1 represents the descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) of all the study variables – Total academic stress (Physical, Interpersonal Relationship, Academic, Environmental), Psychological wellbeing (Autonomy, Environmental mastery, Personal growth, Positive relation, Purpose in life, Self-acceptance), Total perfectionism, (Concern over mistakes and doubts about actions, Excessive concern with parents’ expectations and evaluation, Excessively high personal standards, Concern with precision, order and organization).

Figure 2

		Total student stress	SS_Physical	SS_Interpersonal Relationship	SS_Academic	SS_Environmental	PWB_Autonomy	PWB_Environmental mastery	PWB_Personal growth	PWB_Positive relation	PWB_Purpose in life	PWB_Self-acceptance	Total perfectionism	P_Concern over mistakes and doubts about actions
P_Excessively high personal standards	Pearson Correlation	-.22 [*]	-.305 ^{**}	.068	-.337 [*]	-.007	-.237 [*]	.010	-.090	-.102	-.012	.201 [*]	.294 ^{**}	-.020
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.026	.002	.499	.001	.369	.016	.918	.331	.315	.996	.041	.003	.044
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
P_Concern with precision, order and organisation	Pearson Correlation	.059	.192	.074	-.027	.020	-.156	-.475 ^{**}	.099	-.295 [*]	-.061	.144	-.390 ^{**}	-.382 ^{**}
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.059	.056	.401	.782	.847	.120	.000	.327	.003	.618	.114	.000	.000
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

		P_Excessive concern with parents' expectations and evaluation	P_Excessively high personal standards	P_Concern with precision, order and organisation
P_Excessively high personal standards	Pearson Correlation	-.085	1	-.243 [*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.400		.015
	N	100	100	100
P_Concern with precision, order and organisation	Pearson Correlation	-.105	-.243 [*]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.297	.015	
	N	100	100	100

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
 * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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Figure 2 the Pearson correlation analysis showed several significant correlations between the variables of interest. Total student stress is positively correlated with dimensions of academic stress (SS_Physical, SS_Interpersonal Relationship, SS_Academic, SS_Environmental) and negatively correlated with dimensions of psychological well-being (PWB_Autonomy, PWB_Personal growth, PWB_Positive relation, PWB_Purpose in life, PWB_Self-acceptance).

Total perfectionism is positively correlated with total student stress and the dimensions of academic stress, while being negatively correlated with several dimensions of psychological well-being. - The dimensions of perfectionism, such as "Concern over mistakes and doubts about actions" and "Excessive concern with parents' expectations and evaluation," show similar patterns of correlations with academic stress and psychological well-being.

Figure 3

		Total student stress	SS_Physical	SS_Interpersonal Relationship	SS_Academic	SS_Environmental	PWB_Autonomy	PWB_Environmental mastery	PWB_Personal growth	PWB_Positive relation	PWB_Purpose in life	PWB_Self-acceptance	Total perfectionism
P_Excessively high personal standards	Correlation Coefficient	.187	.334**	.362**	-.029	.036	-.256*	.157	-.020	-.224*	.108	.216**	.427**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.290	.735	.008	.775	.875	.010	.119	.484	.025	.285	.005	.000
	N	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	190
P_Concern with precision, order and organisation	Correlation Coefficient	-.012	.003	.061	-.016	.006	-.176	-.519**	.185	-.233*	-.172	.230*	-.436**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.982	.902	.544	.875	.952	.075	.008	.086	.020	.086	.019	.000
	N	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	190

		P_Concern over mistakes and doubts about actions	P_Excessive concern with parents' expectations and evaluation	P_Excessively high personal standards	P_Concern with precision, order and organisation
P_Excessively high personal standards	Correlation Coefficient	.098	-.163	1.000	-.149
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.334	.105		.138
	N	100	100	100	100
P_Concern with precision, order and organisation	Correlation Coefficient	-.348**	-.131	-.149	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.194	.138	
	N	100	100	100	100

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In figure 3 it can be seen that the Spearman's rho correlations also largely corroborates the findings from the Pearson correlations. Total student stress and total perfectionism maintain strong positive correlations, while total perfectionism and its dimensions are negatively associated with various aspects of psychological well-being. The dimension of perfectionism related to "Excessively high personal standards" shows a positive correlation with total perfectionism, but a negative correlation with dimensions of psychological well-being. The dimension of perfectionism related to "Concern with precision, order and organisation" exhibits a negative correlation with PWB_Environmental mastery and PWB_Positive relation.

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Figure 4

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1	-														
2	.71*	-													
3	.78*	.34*	-												
4	.78*	.49*	.40*	-											
5	.87*	.54*	.81*	.46*	-										
6	-.32*	-.34*	-.27*	-.06	-.40*	-									
7	.28*	.15	.37*	.11	.29*	.23*	-								
8	-.21*	-.07	-.16	-.08	-.33*	.69*	.17	-							
9	-.57*	-.62*	-.38*	-.35*	-.52*	.66*	.18	.36*	-						
10	.07	.21*	.22*	-.07	-.00	.17	.71*	.40*	.21*	-					
11	-.05	-.16	.24*	-.25*	.08	-.00	.20*	-.24*	.19	.02	-				
12	.45*	.23*	.47*	.34*	.40	-.10	.45*	.06	-.23*	.22*	.04	-			
13	.52*	.38*	.25*	.59*	.36*	-.01	.45*	.20*	-.23*	.22*	-.21*	.74*	-		
14	.35*	.17	.47*	.17	.33*	-.02	.28*	-.05	-.09	.14	.16	.71*	.22*	-	
15	-.22*	-.30*	.06	-.33*	-.08	-.23*	.01	-.09	-.10	-.01	.20*	.29*	-.02	-.08	-
16	.05	.19	.07	-.02	.02	-.15	-.47*	.09	-.29*	-.05	.14	-.38*	-.38*	-.10	-.24*

The Table in figure 4 represents the coefficient of correlation between Total academic stress (Physical, Interpersonal Relationship, Academic, Environmental), Psychological wellbeing (Autonomy, Environmental mastery, Personal growth, Positive relation, Purpose in life, Self-acceptance), Total perfectionism, (Concern over mistakes and doubts about actions, Excessive concern with parents' expectations and evaluation, Excessively high personal standards, Concern with precision, order and organization).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study suggest that higher levels of perfectionism and academic stress are associated with poorer psychological well-being among college students. Specifically, the data analysis reveals significant positive correlations between total student stress, dimensions of academic stress, and total perfectionism. Conversely, total perfectionism and its dimensions show negative correlations with various aspects of psychological well-being, including autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

Limitation

The study employed a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to infer causal relationships between the variables. Longitudinal research would be beneficial to examine the dynamic nature of these relationships over time. The sample was limited to college students, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations. Expanding the study to include a more diverse sample could provide further insights. The use of self-report measures may be subject to potential biases, such as social desirability or

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recall issues. Incorporating multiple methods of data collection, including behavioural or observational measures, could strengthen the validity of the findings.

Implications

The results of this study have important implications for the mental health and well-being of college students. The strong associations between perfectionism, academic stress, and psychological well-being suggest that addressing maladaptive perfectionism and mitigating academic stress may be crucial in promoting student success and flourishing. Interventions targeting these factors could help foster a more supportive and nurturing academic environment for students.

Recommendations

1. Develop and implement campus-wide programs and counseling services that focus on helping students manage perfectionist tendencies and reduce academic stress. This could include workshops on stress management, cognitive-behavioral therapy, and building resilience.
2. Encourage faculty and staff to adopt more supportive and empathetic approaches in their interactions with students, fostering a culture that values personal growth and well-being over rigid performance standards.
3. Conduct further research to explore the longitudinal relationships between these variables and investigate potential moderating or mediating factors that may influence the observed associations.
4. Explore the role of social support, coping strategies, and other personal and environmental factors that may buffer the negative impact of perfectionism and academic stress on psychological well-being.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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