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Research Paper

A Study of Relationship between Maladaptive Daydreaming, Impulsivity and Procrastination Among Students and Working Professionals

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ABSTRACT

Maladaptive daydreaming (MD) is a mental concept defined by concerning and full-scale daydreaming that disturbs daily activities. Previous studies have linked MD to increased emotional distress levels and lack of self- regulation, but its evidence-based relationship with impulsivity and work-related procrastination has not been clearly investigated. In the study under consideration, 208 Indian population who were either student participants (n= 108) or working professional (n= 100) completed standardized measures, i.e. the Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS-16), the Short UPPS-P Impulsive Behaviour Scale, and the Pure-Procrastination Scale (PPS). Analytic methods were Pearson product-moment correlations to examine interrelations among variables and independent t-tests to examine group differences. Results showed statistically significant positive correlation between MD and procrastination in both the student and professional groups but MD did not show statistically significant relationship with measures of impulsivity. There was a large difference of procrastination in groups but not MD or impulsivity. These findings suggest that MD is and avoidance- based cognitive mechanism which promotes procrastination, as opposed to being the manifestation of generalised impulsive behaviour.

Keywords: *Maladaptive daydreaming, Procrastination, Impulsivity, Self- Regulation, Cognitive Avoidance, Students, Working Professionals*

Maladaptive daydreaming (MD) is marked by excessive preoccupation with fantasy that causes disturbances in day-to-day activities and causes significant distress. Conversely to normative imagination or spontaneous mind- wandering, MD is defined by compulsive absorption in extensive internal narratives, diminished control over fantasy involvement and the following impairment of academic, work, and social functioning.

By modifying the working of this construct, Somer et al. (2016) developed the Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS- 16) and, thus, MD as a measurable and clinically meaningful psychological phenomena. Later research suggested diagnostic criteria that puts strong emphasis on compulsive immersion and functional impairment (Somer et al.,2017).

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Recent practical findings have shown that maladaptive dreaming is also positively linked with depression, anxiety, dissociation and attention- related problems (Somer et al.,25). These correlations indicate that MD can be indicative to general self- regulatory vulnerabilities that includes emotional dysregulation and inability to switch off internally generated cognitive processes. The cognitive- behavioural models view MD as an avoidance- based coping mechanisms, which is connected by the negative reinforcement (Lucas and Bone, 2025). Immersive Fantasy can provisionally suppress distress or task related pain, thus supporting future lack of engagement with external demands.

Due to its compulsive nature and loss of self-control, maladaptive daydreaming can conceptually overlap with impulsivity and procrastination two constructs which have the sustained goal-directed behaviour failures as a central worrying issue.

Maladaptive Daydreaming and Impulsivity

Impulsivity refers to a tendency of acting quickly and unplanned, without a reasonable thought of possible outcomes. The concept of UPPS-P model defines impulsivity in variety of dimensions, including urgency, lack of premeditation, lack of perseverance and sensation seeking (Cyders et al.,2014). The impulsivity is mostly constructed as the lack of control and regulation of behaviour.

New evidence-based studies have pointed out the correlation between maladaptive daydreaming (MD) and Impulsivity. Demirbas (2021) found that there is a positive correlation between MD and impulsive characteristics. Similarly, Ogut et al. (2025) have ascertained that maladaptive, but not simply immersive, daydreaming was linked to impulsivity and maladaptive coping mechanisms. Such results propose that the problem of over-involvement wih fantasy can be associated with the loss of regulatory control.

However, MD is perceptually different to impulsive behaviour. Whereas impulsivity is a quick action of behaviour, maladaptive daydreaming is a behaviour od immersive cognition. Thomson and Jaque (2023) revealed that people with high MD are more emotionally overexcited and have difficulties with emotional regulation, which suggests that emotional processes can be at the correlation between MD and impulsivity is still theoretical but not empirically established.

Procrastination and Maladaptive Daydreaming

Procrastination refers to the voluntary delay of an intended action even after knowing the negative outcomes (Steel, 2007). It is conceptualized as a failure of self-regulation, which is based on instant mood uplifting and responsiveness to short-term reward. The theory of Temporal Motivation holds that impulsivity enhances the desire to have the instant reward rather than the future payoff, thus encouraging task procrastination.

Some recent research has stated to directly associate maladaptive daydreaming with procrastination. According to Karaagac and Korkmaz (2025), MD and academic procrastination are significantly linked. Qualitative data show that subjects with MD often complain of wasting significant time in deep fantasy, which results in task lateness and poor performance (Richardson, 2023). Since one of the diagnostic criteria is functional impairment (Somer et al., 2017), procrastination could be one of the visible behavioural symptoms of immersive cognitive avoidance.

The two have been discussed as maladaptive daydreaming and procrastination as avoidance-based behaviour aimed at relieving short term emotions (Steel,2007; Lucas and Bone, 2025). Thus, it is theoretically expected that a noticeable association between MD and procrastination will occur.

Impulsivity and Procrastination

The connection between impulsivity and procrastination is one of the strongest results of the research on procrastination. According to a meta-analysis conducted by Steel (2007), the study found that impulsivity was a very steady dispositional predictor of ask delay. Rebetez et al. (2016, 2018) proved that intrusive thoughts and inhibitions deficits are important predictors of procrastination. More currently, Siddiquei and Sharma (2025) discovered that mind wandering moderates the connection that exists between impulsivity as well as procrastination, where internally generated cognitive action contributes to postponing task initiation.

Since there are established associations between impulsiveness and procrastination, and new associations between MD and impulsiveness, it is possible that maladaptive daydreaming can have an indirect impact on procrastination in a common self-regulatory failures.

The Students and Working Professionals

Procrastination studies have mostly been conducted among students, but workplace procrastination is now being realized (Metin et al.,2016). Nonetheless, there is still limited comparative research conducted to on maladaptive daydreaming and impulsivity in academic and occupational settings (Fauziah and Shalli, 2025). It may be possible to examine these constructs by group and therefore understand the nature of maladaptive daydreaming as a context- specific or trans- contextual vulnerability.

Current Study

The current research study in question explored how maladaptive daydreaming, impulsivity and procrastination are interrelated among students and working professionals. These constructs also examined group variations alongside these constructs and found out whether such academic and occupational setup have any effect of their manifestation.

Hypothesis

- **H1:** There is no significant relationship between Maladaptive Daydreaming, Impulsivity and Procrastination among students.
- **H2:** There is no significant relationship between Maladaptive Daydreaming, Impulsivity and Procrastination among working professionals.
- **H3:** There is no significant difference in the levels of Maladaptive Daydreaming, Impulsivity and Procrastination across students and working professionals.

METHOD OF STUDY

Sample

The sample involved 208 Indians aged between 18- 35 years including 108 students and 100 working professionals, The sampling was done using snowball and convenience sampling.

Instruments

- **The Maladaptive Daydreaming Scale (MDS-16)** was used measure Maladaptive daydreaming. The statements are given scores based on a percentage scale ranging

between 0 percent to 100 percent displaying how much the statement pertains to the experiences of the daydreamer. When the score is 40 or higher, it is an indication of likely maladaptive daydreaming. The scales have proven to be reliable and valid in the previous studies (Schimmenti et al., 2020). Analysis was done based on total score.

- **The short version of the UPPS-P Impulsive Behaviour Scale** (Cyders et al., 2014) was used to measure impulsivity as five dimensions of impulsivity are tested. The greater the scores, the greater the impulsive tendencies. The overall impulsivity was represented using the total score.
- **The Pure Procrastination Scale (PPS)** was used to measure procrastination, where general delay tendencies of starting and finishing tasks were measured. The greater the scored the higher the procrastination. Statistical analysis was done on the total score.

Procedure: Data collection occurred via an online survey, informed consent was obtained first. Participants then completed a demographic questionnaire, followed by the psychometric scales with instruction to respond honestly under assurance of anonymity and confidentiality. Participants were fully debriefed about the study and no incentive provided

RESULTS

Table No. 1 correlation between maladaptive daydreaming, impulsivity and procrastination among students

	Statistic	MDS-16	PPS	Short UPPS-P Scale
MDS-16	**Pearson Correlation**	1	.463	-0.068
	Sig. (2-tailed)	—	<.001	0.487
	N	108	108	108
PPS	**Pearson Correlation**	.463	1	-.201
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	—	0.037
	N	108	108	108
Short UPPS-P scale	**Pearson Correlation**	-0.068	-.201	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.487	0.037	—
	N	108	108	108

It is indicated that Maladaptive Daydreaming (MD) had a positive relationship with procrastination in both students ($r= 0.463$, $p <0.001$) and working professionals ($r= 0.468$, $p <0.001$), but no significant correlation was identified between MD and Impulsivity ($r= −.068$, $p= 0.487$ for students; $r= 0.002$, $p= 0.988$ for professionals). Impulsivity showed a significant low negative relation with procrastination in the case of students ($r= −.0.201$, $p= 0.037$) and no significant relationship in the professional sample ($r= 0.016$, $p= 0.871$).

Table No. 2 correlation between maladaptive daydreaming, impulsivity and procrastination among working professionals

	Statistic	MDS-16	PPS	Short UPPS-P Scale
MDS-16	**Pearson Correlation**	**1**	**.468**	**0.002**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**—**	**<.001**	**0.988**
	N	**100**	**100**	**100**
PPS	**Pearson Correlation**	**.468**	**1**	**-0.016**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**<.001**	**—**	**0.871**
	N	**100**	**100**	**100**

	Statistic	MDS-16	PPS	Short UPPS-P Scale
Short UPPS-P Scale	**Pearson Correlation**	**0.002**	**-0.016**	**1**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**0.988**	**0.871**	**—**
	N	**100**	**100**	**100**

Independent- Samples t-test:

It showed significant mean difference between students and professionals on MD Scale (t= 1.671, df= 206, two-tailed p = 0.096, 95% CI [− 0.872, 10.577]) and Pure Procrastination Scale (t=3.095, df= 206, two-tailed p = 0.002, 95% CI [2.536, 11.432]), but there was not statistically significant difference on the short UPPS-P Impulsivity Scale (t= −0.969, df= 206, two-tailed p = 0.334, 95% CI [−1.842, 0.628]) . Tests of homogeneity variance in all three scales (MDS F= 0.000, p = 0.998 Procrastination F = 0.020, p= 0.888; short UPPS-P F = 1.499, p = 0.222) were found to be homogeneous by Levene's tests.

These results indicate the maladaptive day dreaming is a strong predictor of procrastination in students and professional populations and impulsivity plays a minor role in predicting the difference in procrastination, The results also show that there is a great difference between groups in terms of scores of MD and Procrastination, but not in Impulsivity, which highlights the divergent patterns of cognitive- behavioural features in the target groups.

Table No. 3 independent sample t-test between student and working professionals

				Significance				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		t	**df**	**One-Sided p**	**Two-Sided p**	**Mean Difference**	**Std. Error Difference**	**Lower**	**Upper**
MDS-16	**Equal variances assumed**	1.671	206	0.048	0.096	4.852	2.904	-0.872	10.577
	Equal variances not assumed	1.674	205.74	0.048	0.096	4.852	2.899	-0.863	10.567
PPS	**Equal variances assumed**	3.095	206	0.001	0.002	6.984	2.256	2.536	11.432
	Equal variances not assumed	3.098	205.408	0.001	0.002	6.984	2.254	2.54	11.428
Short UPPS-P Scale	**Equal variances assumed**	-0.969	206	0.167	0.334	-0.607	0.626	-1.842	0.628
	Equal variances not assumed	-0.964	196.282	0.168	0.336	-0.607	0.63	-1.849	0.635

DISCUSSION

The current research examined the correlations between maladaptive daydreaming, impulsive and procrastination in students and working adults, These results are valuable in terms of the theoretic explanation of the part of immersive cognitive processes in the failure of self- regulation.

Maladaptive Daydreaming and Procrastination

The strongest result was the strong positive correlation between MD and procrastination in students and working professionals. The null hypothesis that indicated absence of a relationship were thus rejected. Those reporting having higher immersive fantasy engagement also exhibited more task delay. This result suggests cognitive- behavioural theories of maladaptive daydreaming as an avoidance- based coping mechanism (Lucas and Bone, 2025). Resorting to elaborate fantasy can offer immediate emotional relief, stress relief, or performance- related anxiety relief. But such a short-term mood repair is at the expense of long-term goal achievement. Regarding reinforcement, the positive or calming down features or immersive daydreaming can reinforce the inclination to avoid attention to hard work. The similarity of such relationship in both academic and occupational settings indicates that maladaptive daydreaming is a trans-contextual weakness and not a phenomenon relevant to the student group. It builds up on the previous results that only MD has a specific relationship with academic procrastination (Karaagac & Korkmaz, 2025) by showing that this pattern is also present among the working population. Critically, the outcome of this discovery explains why maladaptive daydreaming can be a contributor of procrastination without being linked to impulsivity. Even immersive internal cognition can serve as a competing goal directed system, taking attention resources away during task engagement.

Maladaptive Daydreaming and Impulsivity

However, contrary to the previous studies (Demirbas, 2021; Ogut et al., 2025), no meaningful statistical relationship was found between maladaptive daydreaming and general impulsivity in any of the groups. The null hypothesis was accepted. This observation implies that maladaptive daydreaming does not necessarily indicate a deficit inhibitory control which is generalized. When making a hasty decision, impulsiveness is part of the behaviour, but when making an obsessive daydream, maladaptive daydreaming is considered to be persistence of internal structure of thought in a cognitive way. Lack of correlation implies that engaging in immersive fantasy can be mediated by other mechanisms, rather than behavioural impulsivity. There is a possibility that certain dimensions of impulsivity (e.g. urgency) can be associated with negligence by total scores. In its turn, MD can be more directly connected to the shortcomings of emotional regulation than to the predisposition to impulsive actions (Thomson and Jaque, 2023).

Procrastination and Impulsivity

The correlation between impulsivity and procrastination was intermittent. Although a weak negative correlation was found between the students, no significant correlation was found between the working professionals. Such results do not coincide with the meta- analysis data which places impulsivity as a powerful predictor of procrastination (Steel, 2007). One reason is that, in this sample, cognitive avoidance as opposed to impulsive behaviour may be a stronger motivator to procrastination. It was established that mind- wandering is between the impulsivity and procrastination correlation (Siddiqi and Sharma, 2025). An extreme variety of internal generated thought, maladaptive daydreaming, could directly related to

procrastination therefore can be achieved by various psychological mechanisms: impulsivity- driven behavioural disinhibition and immersive disengaged thought. The current evidence implies that the latter route can be special relevance.

Group Difference

There were no remarkable differences between maladaptive daydreaming or impulsivity between students and working professionals. Nonetheless, procrastination was differently significant. This implies that environmentally- related considerations such as academic flexibility or work design might impact task delay more than cognitive tendencies at the trial level. The consistency of maladaptive daydreaming in contexts contributes to the idea that it is a relatively stable cognitive experimental pattern and a situational event.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research.

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