

When Perfection Delays Action: Examining the Relationship between Maladaptive Perfectionism and Procrastination in Emerging Adults

Falguni Chauhan^{1*}

ABSTRACT

Perfectionism and procrastination are two prominent psychological constructs that frequently co-occur, particularly during emerging adulthood. While perfectionism is often associated with high achievement and motivation, maladaptive forms of perfectionism may paradoxically contribute to avoidance behaviours such as procrastination. The present study examined the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and procrastination among emerging adults in India, with an emphasis on the cultural and developmental context. A cross-sectional correlational design was employed with a sample of 75 participants ($M = 23.5$ years, $SD = 3.2$) recruited via convenience sampling. Maladaptive perfectionism was assessed using the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Frost et al., 1990) and procrastination was measured using the Procrastination Assessment Scale for Students (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). Reliability analyses indicated good internal consistency for both instruments ($\alpha = .87$ and $\alpha = .89$, respectively). Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a significant moderate positive association between maladaptive perfectionism and procrastination ($r = .48$, $p < .001$). Linear regression confirmed that maladaptive perfectionism significantly predicted procrastination ($\beta = .48$, $p < .001$), accounting for 22% of the variance ($R^2 = .22$). These findings support cognitive-behavioural models implicating fear of failure, self-critical cognitions, and emotional regulation difficulties in task avoidance. Theoretical and practical implications for psychological interventions targeting self-regulation in emerging adults are discussed.

Keywords: *Perfectionism, Procrastination, Emerging Adults, Self-Regulation, India*

Perfectionism has long been a subject of interest within psychological research, traditionally conceptualized as a personality trait characterized by the setting of excessively high standards and a tendency toward critical self-evaluation (Frost et al., 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Although early perspectives framed perfectionism as a desirable characteristic associated with diligence and achievement, contemporary research has increasingly emphasized its multidimensional nature, distinguishing between adaptive and maladaptive components. Adaptive perfectionism is generally linked to organization, goal-setting, and persistence, whereas maladaptive perfectionism is characterized by excessive concern over mistakes, fear of negative evaluation, and chronic self-doubt.

¹Student, National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disabilities (NIEPVD), India

*Corresponding Author

Received: June 5, 2026; Revision Received: June 24, 2026; Accepted: June 28, 2026

When Perfection Delays Action: Examining the Relationship between Maladaptive Perfectionism and Procrastination in Emerging Adults

One of the most paradoxical outcomes associated with maladaptive perfectionism is procrastination. Procrastination is defined as the voluntary delay of an intended course of action despite expecting negative consequences (Steel, 2007). It is widely considered a failure of self-regulation and has been associated with a range of adverse outcomes, including increased stress, anxiety, poor academic performance, and reduced psychological well-being.

Cognitive-behavioural theories provide a useful framework for understanding this paradox. Individuals high in maladaptive perfectionism tend to hold rigid and unrealistic beliefs about performance and outcomes. These beliefs often give rise to fear of failure and heightened sensitivity to evaluation, leading individuals to avoid initiating or completing tasks. In this context, procrastination serves as an avoidance-based coping mechanism that temporarily alleviates anxiety but reinforces maladaptive behavioural patterns over time (Sirois, 2014).

Emerging adulthood, defined as the developmental period between 18 and 30 years, represents a particularly critical stage for examining these dynamics (Arnett, 2000). This period is characterized by identity exploration, increased autonomy, and significant academic and professional demands. The pressures associated with achieving success during this stage may exacerbate fear of failure, thereby increasing the likelihood of procrastination. In the Indian context, cultural factors may further intensify this relationship. Indian society places a strong emphasis on academic achievement, social comparison, and familial expectations, which may foster internalization of high standards and contribute to maladaptive perfectionism. Despite the relevance of these factors, empirical research within the Indian cultural context remains relatively limited.

The present study seeks to address this gap by examining the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and procrastination among emerging adults in India. It is hypothesized that maladaptive perfectionism will be positively associated with procrastination and will significantly predict procrastination behaviours.

METHOD

Participants

The study included 75 participants aged between 18 and 30 years ($M = 23.5$, $SD = 3.2$), comprising undergraduate students, postgraduate students, and young working professionals. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling through online platforms including social media and academic networks. Inclusion criteria required participants to fall within the specified age range and possess sufficient English proficiency to complete the survey.

Measures

- **Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS; Frost et al., 1990):** The MPS was used to assess dimensions of perfectionism including concern over mistakes, personal standards, doubts about actions, parental expectations, and organization across 35 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Maladaptive perfectionism was operationalized using the subscales of Concern over Mistakes, Doubts about Actions, and Parental Expectations, as these dimensions are consistently associated with self-critical evaluation and psychological distress. Subscale scores were combined to compute an overall maladaptive perfectionism score. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$).

When Perfection Delays Action: Examining the Relationship between Maladaptive Perfectionism and Procrastination in Emerging Adults

- **Procrastination Assessment Scale for Students (PASS; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984):** Procrastination was assessed using the PASS, which measures academic procrastination including delay in studying, completing assignments, and meeting deadlines. For young working professionals, scale items were framed to reflect task-related delay within professional workflows, as the core psychological mechanisms of procrastination manifest similarly across academic and early-career domains (Sirois & Pychyl, 2013). Internal consistency was strong (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$).

Procedure

Data were collected via an online survey administered through Google Forms. Participants provided informed consent prior to participation. The survey required approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Data were screened for completeness; no cases with substantial missing data were identified. Minor missing values were handled using listwise deletion, resulting in a final analytic sample of $N = 75$.

Ethics Statement

The study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Formal ethical approval was not required as per institutional guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout.

Design and Analysis

A cross-sectional correlational design was employed. Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Reliability analyses were conducted prior to inferential tests. Descriptive statistics were computed, followed by Pearson's correlation and linear regression analyses.

Distributional assumptions were evaluated prior to inferential analyses. Linearity was confirmed using scatterplots. Normality was assessed through skewness and kurtosis indices, all within the acceptable absolute threshold of $|1.0|$ (Maladaptive Perfectionism: Skewness = -0.24 , Kurtosis = -0.41 ; Procrastination: Skewness = 0.15 , Kurtosis = -0.32). No outliers were identified via Mahalanobis distance screening. A post-hoc power analysis (G*Power 3.1) confirmed adequate statistical power of $.97$ for detecting a medium effect size ($f^2 = .15$) at $\alpha = .05$.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics indicated moderate levels of maladaptive perfectionism ($M = 72.45$, $SD = 8.21$) and procrastination ($M = 65.32$, $SD = 7.98$). Table 1 presents means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations between study variables.

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2
1. Maladaptive Perfectionism	72.45	8.21	--	
2. Procrastination	65.32	7.98	.48***	--

Note. *** $p < .001$.

Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a significant moderate positive relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and procrastination ($r = .48$, $p < .001$). A linear regression analysis confirmed that maladaptive perfectionism was a significant predictor of

When Perfection Delays Action: Examining the Relationship between Maladaptive Perfectionism and Procrastination in Emerging Adults

procrastination ($\beta = .48, p < .001$), accounting for approximately 22% of the variance, $R^2 = .22, F(1, 73) = 20.59, p < .001$. Table 2 presents the full regression output.

Table 2 Linear Regression of Maladaptive Perfectionism Predicting Procrastination

Variable	β	SE	t	p	95% CI
Intercept	--	7.14	4.59	< .001	[18.68, 47.42]
Maladaptive Perfectionism	.48	0.10	4.54	< .001	[0.27, 0.69]

Note. β = standardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval. $R^2 = .22, F(1, 73) = 20.59, p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

The present study found strong support for the hypothesized association between maladaptive perfectionism and procrastination. Consistent with prior research, individuals with higher levels of self-critical perfectionism were more likely to delay tasks, supporting cognitive-behavioural models that implicate fear of failure and avoidance-based coping in procrastination.

The findings are particularly relevant in the context of emerging adulthood, a stage characterized by increasing academic and professional demands. Cultural factors in the Indian context, including the emphasis on achievement and social comparison, may further intensify these tendencies.

The study highlights the potential mediating role of emotional processes including anxiety and low self-compassion (Neff, 2011; Sirois & Pychyl, 2013), which were not directly measured but are theoretically linked to both constructs. Future research should explore these variables as mediators.

From a practical standpoint, university counselling services may benefit from integrating maladaptive perfectionism screening into mental health assessments. Cognitive-behavioural interventions targeting fear of failure, including CBT and ACT, may help individuals develop more flexible performance standards. Structured workshops addressing self-compassion, time management, and emotional regulation may also be beneficial (Neff, 2011; Sirois, 2014).

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be noted. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; longitudinal research is needed to establish directionality. Second, the convenience sample ($N = 75$) limits generalizability. Future research should employ stratified sampling with larger samples. Third, the use of a student-oriented scale with working professionals may introduce construct validity concerns; future studies should consider employing the Pure Procrastination Scale (Steel, 2010) or adapting items for professional contexts. Fourth, reliance on self-report measures raises the possibility of common method bias. Multi-method, multi-wave longitudinal designs are recommended for future research.

CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrates that maladaptive perfectionism is a significant predictor of procrastination among emerging adults. Individuals with higher levels of perfectionistic concerns are more likely to delay tasks due to fear of failure and self-critical tendencies.

When Perfection Delays Action: Examining the Relationship between Maladaptive Perfectionism and Procrastination in Emerging Adults

Addressing these patterns through cognitive-behavioural and self-compassion-based interventions may enhance productivity, emotional well-being, and overall functioning.

REFERENCES

- Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development. *American Psychologist*, 55(5), 469-480.
- Frost, R. O., Marten, P., Lahart, C., & Rosenblate, R. (1990). The dimensions of perfectionism. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 14(5), 449-468.
- Hewitt, P. L., & Flett, G. L. (1991). Perfectionism in the self and social contexts. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60(3), 456-470.
- Neff, K. D. (2011). Self-compassion and its role in psychological well-being. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 20(1), 1-6.
- Rice, K. G., Richardson, C. M., & Tueller, S. (2014). The short form of the revised almost perfect scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 96(3), 368-379.
- Sirois, F. M. (2014). Procrastination and stress: Exploring the role of self-compassion. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 37(3), 433-444.
- Sirois, F. M., & Pychyl, T. A. (2013). Procrastination and the priority of short-term mood regulation: Consequences for future self. *European Journal of Personality*, 27(4), 428-444.
- Smith, M. M., Sherry, S. B., & Hewitt, P. L. (2020). Perfectionism and psychopathology: A meta-analysis. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 24(4), 367-391.
- Solomon, L. J., & Rothblum, E. D. (1984). Academic procrastination: Frequency and cognitive-behavioral correlates. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 31(4), 503-509.
- Steel, P. (2007). The nature of procrastination: A meta-analytic and theoretical review of quintessential self-regulatory failure. *Psychological Bulletin*, 133(1), 65-94.
- Steel, P., & Klingsieck, K. B. (2016). Academic procrastination: Psychological antecedents revisited. *Australian Psychologist*, 51(1), 36-46.

Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Chauhan, F. (2026). When Perfection Delays Action: Examining the Relationship between Maladaptive Perfectionism and Procrastination in Emerging Adults. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 14(2), 2668-2672. DIP:18.01.241.20261402, DOI:10.25215/1402.241