

Research Paper

Perfectionism, Self-Handicapping, and Self-Esteem among College Students: A Correlational Study

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship among perfectionism, self-handicapping, and self-esteem in college students. Sampling of 120 students aged 18–25 years was conducted as incidental. A range of standard measures, such as the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, Self-Handicapping Scale, and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale were utilized to collect data. Results yielded a significant and positive relationship regarding perfectionism and self-handicapping, a substantial negative relationship between perfectionism and self-esteem, as well as self-handicapping and self-esteem. Self-handicapping was also significantly predictive of self-esteem in regression analysis. The results show maladaptive perfectionism and defensive coping strategies as significant determinants of students' self-worth and academic behaviour.

Keywords: *Perfectionism, Self-Handicapping, Self-Esteem, College Students*

Perfectionism and self-handicapping and self-esteem are interrelated psychological phenomena that impact the students' academic performance as well as their emotional health. In typical academic environments, today's students face high standards from themselves, classmates, peers, and at home and pressure to perform. Exercising their best in high-achieving settings can be aspirational, though, when also when the system can lead to unrealistic and overly set expectations. Perfectionism, maladaptively in such a state, leads to excessive self-criticism, fear of failure, and extreme self-criticism. And students who score this way with these sorts of tendencies might struggle to be happy with their performance, even if they did very well. In the long run, the habit can be stressful, anxiety-provoking, and unhealthy in terms of dealing with academic stress to the detriment of self-esteem. One kind of such coping mechanism is self-handicapping. For example, this would be behaviors like procrastination.

Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to examine the relationships among perfectionism, self-handicapping, and self-esteem among young adults.

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Hypotheses

1. There will be a positive relationship between perfectionism and self-handicapping.
2. There will be a negative relationship between perfectionism and self-esteem.
3. There will be a negative relationship between self-esteem and self-handicapping

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The current study used a correlational research design to explore relationships between perfectionism, self-handicapping and self-esteem. To establish the association, regressions were performed to examine the predictive relations between the variables. Participants. The sample included 120 students (64 males and 56 females) recruited through incidental sampling. Subjects were between 18 and 25 years of age and were students in undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Participants all were from middle socioeconomic level. Inclusion Criteria. Students aged 18 to 25. Participating in undergraduate or postgraduate programs. Willing to participate in the study.

Variables

- Predictor Variables: Perfectionism, Self-Handicapping.
- Criterion Variable: Self-Esteem.

Tools

- Perfectionism was assessed via the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale, developed by Frost et al. (1990). It includes 35 items, measured on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). It measures such dimensions as concern over mistakes and personal standards. Good reliability and validity has already been reported for the scale in earlier research.
- Self-Handicapping Scale (Indian context): Self-handicapping was measured using the scale developed by Kaur and Raji (2022). The instrument consists of 12 items, rated on a 5-point Likert scale between 0 (strongly disagree) and 4 (strongly agree). It measures how much individuals behave in certain ways or claim obstacles to defend their self-esteem. The reported reliability coefficient on the scale is 0.779.
- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES): Self-esteem was assessed with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale for which Rosenberg (1965) is the author. The scale consists of 10 items, with thematically based answers as measured by 4-point Likert-type responses of strongly disagree to strongly agree. It measures global self-esteem and is known to be reliable and valid in various populations. Procedure. Data were obtained by means of standardized questionnaires. The purpose of the study was explained to participants and they consented to participate. Confidentiality and anonymity was guaranteed to the participants. Instructions were given to ensure that answers were submitted honestly. The completed questionnaires were then collected, scored, and prepared for statistical analyses.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to summarize the data. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships among variables, and regression analysis was performed to assess predictive relationships.

RESULTS*Table No. 1 Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables*

Variable	Mean (M)	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Min	Max
Self-Esteem	18.03	4.00	-0.143	-0.156	6	27
Self-Handicapping	36.80	5.84	0.122	0.650	24	53
Perfectionism	109.90	15.95	-0.152	1.067	63	161

The results indicated moderate levels of all variables. Distribution values confirmed normality.

Table No. 2 Correlation Matrix

Variable	Self-Esteem	Perfectionism
Self-Handicapping	-.287**	.509***
Perfectionism	-.285**	—

Note: ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Regression Analysis

- Self-handicapping significantly predicted self-esteem ($\beta = -0.287$, $p = .002$), explaining 8.2% variance.
- Self-esteem significantly predicted perfectionism ($\beta = -0.285$, $p = .002$), explaining 8.1% variance.

DISCUSSION

The study examined the extent to which perfectionism, self-regard and self-handicap are linked among college students. Therefore, these variables seem to be related in meaningful ways and interact with each other to shape student academic behaviour and coping styles. Students who value perfection often do things that actually hurt their chances of succeeding. That means these students may procrastinate or not try hard. Students who want everything just to be perfect, the reason being students might feel a fear of failing, or looking bad. So, they procrastinate to secure their self-esteem when they feel they are going to fail at something. Perfectionism plays a role in things and perfectionism makes students with perfectionism to want everything perfect more prone to do it. Rather than confronting their limitation or perceived weaknesses directly (in front of their peers or family), individuals create external excuses for bad performance. It was also found that perfectionism was significantly negatively associated with self-esteem. Similarly, students with high scoring for maladaptive aspects of perfectionism also reported low scores on self-esteem. This is because we set high standards for ourselves, we think about what we do a lot and we are not satisfied with the outcomes. If we constantly beat ourselves up, then in our mind we tend to be less confident and believe less in ourselves. When we don't think much of ourselves we also seem to make excuses for things that we do not do well. In the face of academic and personal pressures to succeed, students who feel inferior in school are more prone to resort to excuses. This demonstrates that when other individuals feel low-quality, they are going to act and do things that make them think less about their mistakes and failures. Part of that is that we may even be motivated to do things that facilitate our avoidance of actually being stupid about how much less talented we are. All the relationships were statistically significant, but their effect sizes were small. This implies that perfectionism, self-esteem and self-handicapping are significant predictors of student performance, however, they are not the only ones that can impact student behaviour. Academics, personality, and the

environment could also account for them. Overall, the relationships appear to be interrelated among these constructs as the data indicates. When people hold those unrealistically high standards for themselves, and have standards that are not good for them, people feel bad about themselves and make excuses to avoid trying. We believe that if we can change these patterns people might get better at handling issues, feel more confident and more willing to take up problems. So, a problem is maladaptive perfectionism, because it is connected to perfectionism and it may cause people to use maladaptive perfectionism as avoidance. We hope that if perfectionism can be challenged, people learn to deal with things in healthier ways, increase their confidence, and approach academic challenges, such as math and reading, more productively.

CONCLUSION

The current study examined the relationships among perfectionism, self-handicapping, and self-esteem among college students. Based on the three variables and their highly interrelated nature, the study found that students' academic behaviour and psychological adjustment were significantly influenced by these variables. Perfectionism was positively correlated with self-handicapping and negatively correlated with self-esteem. This indicates that students with higher levels of maladaptive perfectionism are more likely to engage in avoidance-based strategies and also experience lower self-worth. Moreover, self-esteem negatively associates with self-handicapping, and indicates that those students with low self-esteem tend to resort to defensive coping strategies. While the findings suggested the relationships were statistically significant, their effects were modest and suggest that other factors are at play here too. A broader emphasis in the final report remains on that maladaptive perfectionism and self-handicapping contribute to students' self-evaluation. Addressing these tendencies in schools promotes better academic engagement and healthier psychological health in students.

Implications

The implications of the present study are variously related to students, teachers, and mental health professionals. At the student level, the outcome indicates that the standard of achievement should be made more realistic and balanced. Such flexibility is probably necessary in order to encourage their students to embrace adaptive perfectionism rather than traditional rigid and self-critical patterns of life. Improving self-confidence decreases the reliance on avoidance-based strategies like procrastination or creating excuses as well. For educators and schools, this result needs to inform the need for supportive learning environments to curb the excess performance pressure. Some methods that help these students overcome the fear of failure would be to provide constructive feedback, build a growth mindset, and normalize mistakes as a part of learning.

Psychologically, the findings would imply that strategies which improve self-esteem and decrease maladaptive perfectionism may benefit from intervention. Cognitive and behavioural approaches to students in the learning context can facilitate recognition and change of unhelpful thought processes, facilitate the adoption of more adaptive coping strategies, build greater personal confidence and promote adaptive behaviours. The study highlights the need to address all these interrelated factors, for healthy academic behaviour, emotional adjustment, and improvement of student well-being.

Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations of the study are limited due to its sample size and self-report nature. The cross-sectional design also precludes drawing causal inferences. Future researchers could sample

from larger and more diverse samples and analyze these relationships beyond these relationships in the future.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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