

Research Paper

Understanding Procrastination Among Gen Z Emerging Adults

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ABSTRACT

Procrastination is increasingly recognized as a psychological and behavioral challenge among emerging adults, particularly within Gen Z. This study explored the lived experiences of procrastination among Gen Z emerging adults in Mangalore, Karnataka, focusing on psychological causes, the impact of digital technology and environmental factors, and consequences for academic performance, well-being, and social relationships. A qualitative phenomenological design was adopted. Ten Gen Z emerging adults aged 18 to 25 were selected through purposive sampling using the General Procrastination Scale (Lodha et al.). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. Five major themes emerged: Internal Psychological Motives, Environmental and Digital Reinforcement, Identity and Self-Concept Dilemma, Functional and Academic Consequences, and Personal and Social Well-Being Impact. Findings indicate that procrastination among Gen Z emerging adults is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by emotion dysregulation, perfectionism, low self-efficacy, and digital overstimulation, underscoring the need for culturally responsive counseling interventions.

Keywords: *procrastination, Gen Z, emerging adulthood, self-regulation, digital technology, perfectionism*

Procrastination as a Psychological Challenge

Procrastination refers to the conscious delay of important activities despite the anticipated outcomes and is an extensive problem among existing adults, particularly those in Gen Z (Steel, 2007; Ghosh & Roy, 2025). Time mismanagement is not the only cause of this behavior; there is a major contribution of psychological, social, and environmental mechanisms (Steel, 2007; Hailikari et al., 2021). Procrastination is not merely a simple form of laziness or disorganization but a multifaceted inability to regulate oneself, where people are consciously aware of the harm they are about to cause themselves yet do it anyway.

Researchers have identified a number of underlying causes of procrastination among emerging adults. The most powerful personality predictor is low conscientiousness, which encompasses lack of self-control, high distractibility, and disorganization (Steel, 2007; Steel & Klingsieck, 2016). Impulsivity, low self-efficacy, perfectionism, fear of failure, and task aversiveness also promote procrastination (Steel, 2007; Hailikari et al., 2021; Pandey, 2025). Moreover, psychological flexibility and the ability to allocate time and energy are strongly

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connected with procrastination; students who struggle with these factors show higher rates of procrastination (Hailikari et al., 2021). The use of digital distractions, especially excessive use of social networks, is becoming an increasingly prominent facilitator of procrastination in Generation Z (Ghosh & Roy, 2025; Rogowska & Cincio, 2024).

The problem of procrastination is significant, particularly within the academic environment. College students widely report procrastinating, and about 74.9% of undergraduates exhibit moderate to high levels of academic procrastination (Journal of Indian Academy of Health Sciences, 2021). In the Indian context, Sharma and Dahiya (2022) found that 69% of college students were moderate to severe procrastinators in relation to digital entertainment and social media use. These statistics emphasize the need to understand procrastination as a significant concern in mental health and behavior among Gen Z emerging adults.

Counselors should be positioned to recognize the complexity of procrastination. Effective intervention must address not only self-regulation and time management but also perfectionism, technology use, and fear of failure (Steel & Klingsieck, 2016; Hailikari et al., 2021). Group counseling, cognitive-behavioral strategies, and psychoeducation have shown promise in addressing procrastination and enhancing student well-being (Setiyowati et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2017).

Gen Z in Emerging Adulthood

Generation Z, defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012 (Pew Research Center, 2019), has grown up in a highly technology-rich environment. This generation is now entering emerging adulthood — the developmental stage between ages 18 and 25 characterized by identity exploration, self-focus, instability, and the pursuit of autonomy and purpose (Arnett, 2000). Recent studies highlight that Gen Z is particularly susceptible to procrastination, aggravated by the proliferation of unceasing digital stimuli and academic stress (Ghosh & Roy, 2025; Rogowska & Cincio, 2024). For Gen Z, who navigate developmental processes amid constant digital stimulation, procrastination is not merely a time management issue but a symptom of underlying psychological and situational stress. Escapism through social media has emerged as a mediating factor between stress and procrastination, illustrating the intricate interplay between technology use and emotional well-being in this generation (Ghosh & Roy, 2025).

Cultural and Contextual Influences

Contextual and cultural experiences significantly influence the expression, perception, and maintenance of procrastination in Gen Z emerging adults. In collectivist cultures such as India, academic success is commonly tied to family honor, social pressure, and community reputation. These pressures can be counterproductive: when the stakes behind a task are too high, fear of failure or of disappointing significant others can trigger a psychological defense mechanism that results in avoidance (Steel, 2007). Students raised under high parental expectations with low emotional support may be especially prone to perfectionism-motivated procrastination (Flett et al., 2016). Placing procrastination within an Indian cultural context allows for a better understanding of how social norms, familial demands, and environmental forces interact with individual psychological traits (Kaur & Pathak, 2021).

Psychological Factors

Psychological factors function as both motivators and barriers when addressing procrastination. Self-regulation — the ability to control oneself with regard to long-term

objectives despite competing forces — is central to explaining procrastination. When self-regulatory resources are depleted or emotionally strained, people are more prone to postponing tasks and engaging in avoidant behaviors (Hailikari et al., 2021; Steel, 2007). Cognitive reappraisal — the skill of reframing situations to modify their emotional impact — has been identified as an adaptive mechanism capable of reducing procrastination. In contrast, emotional suppression and avoidance tend to sustain procrastination long-term because they fail to develop genuine coping capacities (Gross & John, 2003). Negative academic histories and reduced self-efficacy have been consistently associated with increased procrastination behavior (Steel, 2007; Bandura, 1997).

Theoretical Framework

The present study draws on Gross's (1998) Emotion Regulation Theory, which proposes that individuals regulate their emotional experiences through two broad strategies: antecedent-based strategies such as cognitive reappraisal, where a person alters how they think about a situation before the emotion fully develops, and response-based strategies such as suppression, where the emotional response is managed after the emotion has formed. Sirois and Pychyl (2013) extended this framework by arguing that procrastination functions as disguised mood repair — choosing immediate emotional relief over the completion of important tasks. This framework is particularly relevant to Gen Z emerging adults navigating identity transitions, emotional turbulence, and constant digital stimulation.

Research Questions

The present study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the underlying causes and personal experiences that contribute to procrastination among Gen Z emerging adults?
2. How do digital technology, social media, and environmental factors shape procrastination tendencies in this population?
3. In what ways do psychological traits such as self-efficacy, boredom, and perfectionism influence procrastination?
4. How does procrastination affect the academic performance, personal well-being, and social relationships of Gen Z emerging adults?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Psychological and Internal Drivers of Procrastination

Ihkamuddin et al. (2023) reported that internal factors contributing to procrastination include perfectionism, self-efficacy, self-esteem, executive function, personality traits, and self-regulation, while external factors include parenting styles, environmental pressure, excessive technology use, and substance abuse. The identified gaps included an overreliance on quantitative studies and insufficient insight into the dynamics between internal and external variables over time.

Kulsum and Akshaya (2024) conducted a quantitative cross-sectional survey with 258 participants from Generation Z and Millennials. Using the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale and the General Anxiety Scale (GAD-7), they found that doubts about taking action negatively correlated with overall perfectionism, while parental expectations were strongly positively correlated with perfectionism. Significant differences in anxiety levels between the two generations were also identified, suggesting the need for generation-specific intervention strategies.

Asani (2023) reviewed the role of self-control on academic procrastination, finding that individuals with greater self-control demonstrated better studying habits, higher grades, and lower tendencies to procrastinate. The review noted a limitation that most studies employed small, homogenous samples and self-reported measures.

Mohan and Athira (2023) studied procrastination, time management, and self-control among 200 young adults aged 18 to 25. Their findings identified self-control as a primary predictor of procrastination behavior, with no significant gender differences observed.

Zhang et al. (2023) conducted a two-year longitudinal study monitoring 457 students with psychological questionnaires and resting-state brain scans. Poor self-control, limited emotion regulation, and weak episodic prospection at baseline all predicted procrastination scores two years later, suggesting that interventions improving episodic prospection may be particularly effective.

Bernecker and Job (2020) found that students who considered willpower a limited resource were more likely to delay bedtime on highly stressful days, compared to those who viewed willpower as stable. This suggests that stress combined with limited-willpower beliefs produces particular vulnerability to procrastination.

Digital, Environmental, and Workplace Impact on Procrastination

Ghosh and Roy (2025), in a survey of 621 Gen Z respondents in India, found that escapism fully mediates the relationship between procrastination and excessive social media use. Their findings have implications for human resource management and organizational psychology, and the authors called for further research into procrastination reduction and its downstream effects on social media behaviors among Gen Z employees.

Svartdal et al. (2020) found that certain study conditions, particularly those that are distracting or poorly organized, strongly promote procrastination. The researchers offered practical recommendations for constructing study environments that reduce procrastination. Bhutani (2024) reviewed the impact of procrastination on workplace efficiency. Results indicated that procrastination is linked to low productivity, reduced engagement, and elevated burnout, and is influenced by both psychological factors such as anxiety and perfectionism, and organizational factors such as workplace distraction and poor management practices.

Effects of Procrastination on Academic Achievement and Personal Well-Being

Ayub et al. (2025) found that among 110 university educators, high levels of procrastination correlated negatively with job performance, while higher self-efficacy was positively correlated with performance. Maier et al. (2022) demonstrated that employees were less likely to procrastinate on days following higher-quality sleep, and that later chronotypes were particularly reliant on good sleep to prevent procrastination, underscoring the relationship between sleep, self-regulation, and task engagement.

Folsom (2024) examined the coping strategies and mental well-being of Gen Z student leaders. Results indicated that these students face academic stress, time management challenges, and emotional burnout, yet maintain well-being through mindfulness, peer support, and thoughtful self-care. Vangsness et al. (2022) found that self-report measures of procrastination had moderate concurrent validity but poor predictive validity for behavioral

indicators such as task pacing, highlighting the need for greater methodological rigor in procrastination research.

Demographic and Generational Aspects of Procrastination

Lu et al. (2022) found that men procrastinate slightly more than women in general and academic contexts, though the difference was not significant. No significant variations in procrastination were found based on socioeconomic status, cultural background, or educational background. Berinsteroval et al. (2023) found that in women, procrastination was associated with problem-centered coping, while active coping strategies including planning and acceptance were negatively related to procrastination only among women, indicating gender differences in the relationship between coping and procrastination.

Need and Significance of the Study

The majority of available literature on procrastination in Gen Z relies on quantitative approaches, leaving personal triggers and situational factors including digital distractions, family norms, and perfectionism largely unexplored through lived-experience methods. This study fills that gap by using a qualitative phenomenological approach to examine the experiential realities behind procrastinatory behavior among emerging adult students in Mangaluru.

METHOD

Aim and Objectives

The study aimed to explore and understand the lived experiences of procrastination among Gen Z emerging adults. Specific objectives were: (a) to identify the underlying reasons and individual experiences behind procrastination; (b) to explore how digital technology, social media, and environmental factors affect procrastination behaviors; (c) to understand the influence of psychological traits such as self-efficacy, boredom, and perfectionism; and (d) to understand the consequences of procrastination on academic, personal, and social aspects of emerging adults' lives.

Research Design

This study is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, treating reality as subjective and constructed through personal experience. The researcher employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the meaning, causes, and effects of procrastination on everyday life among Gen Z emerging adults, rather than its frequency. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, and data were analyzed using the six-phase thematic analysis model proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Operational Definitions

Procrastination is defined as the act of postponing or delaying tasks despite awareness that such postponement will lead to stress or other undesirable consequences (Steel, 2007). Gen Z refers to individuals born between 1997 and 2012, raised in a fully digitally saturated environment (Pew Research Center, 2019). Emerging adulthood refers to the developmental stage between 18 and 25 years, characterized by identity experimentation, instability, self-focus, and in-betweenness (Arnett, 2000).

Participants

The study focused on Gen Z individuals in the stage of emerging adulthood (ages 18–25) residing in Mangaluru, Karnataka, India. A sample of 10 participants was recruited through purposive sampling. Inclusion criteria required participants to be currently enrolled in higher

education or employed in entry-level positions, able to participate in English-language interviews, and screened as above-average or high procrastinators using the General Procrastination Scale (Lodha et al.). Those with low or average procrastination scores on the screening tool were excluded.

Table 1 Participant Demographic Profile

Participant Code	Age	Gender	Education Level	Procrastination Level
P1	22	Female	Post-graduate	High
P2	21	Female	Post-graduate	Above Average
P3	22	Female	Post-graduate	High
P4	23	Female	Post-graduate	High
P5	19	Female	Undergraduate	High
P6	22	Female	Post-graduate	Above Average
P7	22	Female	Post-graduate	Above Average
P8	23	Female	Post-graduate	Above Average
P9	23	Female	Post-graduate	Above Average
P10	21	Female	Post-graduate	Above Average

Note. All participants were screened using the General Procrastination Scale (Lodha et al.). Four participants scored in the high range and six in the above-average range.

Instruments

General Procrastination Scale (Lodha et al.).

The General Procrastination Scale (GPS) created by Lodha et al. (2016) was used as a screening instrument. The GPS contains 23 items across four domains: academic, workplace, medical, and civic responsibilities. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never to 5 = Always), and items 5, 8, 12, 16, 18, 21, and 23 are reverse-scored. Total scores range from 23 to 115, yielding a Procrastination Quotient (PQ). Norms are: High (75 and above), Above Average (67–75), Average (60–66), and Low (59 and below).

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule.

The researcher developed a semi-structured interview schedule consisting of 10 main questions, accompanied by rapport-building and exit questions. The schedule was validated by three subject matter experts and covered: participants' personal understanding of procrastination; their experiences in academic and personal contexts; the role of digital technology, social media, and peer and family influences; and the consequences of procrastination on academic, personal, and social life.

Procedure

Phase 1 involved formulating and submitting a research proposal for ethical committee review and approval. Eligible participants were contacted and screened using the GPS. Only those scoring in the high or above-average range were invited to the qualitative phase.

Phase 2 involved obtaining written informed consent from eligible participants. The researcher-oriented participants on the study purpose, procedures, confidentiality protections, and their right to withdraw at any time, before conducting individual semi-structured interviews.

Phase 3 involved audio-recording interviews with participant consent and transcribing them verbatim. Identifying information was removed from all transcripts to preserve anonymity.

The researcher bracketed personal assumptions throughout data collection and maintained a reflective journal after each interview.

Phase 4 involved thematic analysis of the transcribed data using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was entirely voluntary, and all participants retained the right to withdraw without penalty at any time. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant after a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and potential benefits. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by removing all identifying information from transcripts and data files. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored securely and used exclusively for this academic study. All sources and references were presented in APA style in accordance with principles of academic integrity.

RESULTS

Thematic analysis of the semi-structured interview data yielded five major themes: (1) Internal Psychological Motives of Procrastination, (2) Environmental and Digital Reinforcement, (3) Identity and Self-Concept Dilemma, (4) Functional and Academic Consequences, and (5) Personal and Social Well-Being Impact. Each theme and its sub-themes are discussed below.

Theme 1: Internal Psychological Motives of Procrastination

Table 2 Theme 1 — Sub-Themes and Keywords

Sub-Theme	Representative Key Phrases
Fear of Judgment and Perfectionism	"I want it to look good; in the process of making it look good, I might not even start it"; "Whatever I do, I want to do it very perfectly"
Low/Varying Self-Efficacy	"I can't even do this one thing right"; "I feel like I can't commit myself into something very serious"; "I cannot distinguish whether what I am doing is laziness or procrastination"
Boredom and Task Aversiveness	"Everything was so boring"; "Eating food is a chore. Everything is a chore"; "When I feel boring, I just want to do something which makes me happy"
Mood Regulation and Emotional Avoidance	"I have to be in my best mood to get that work done — that mood is never there"; "I feel guilty but yet I still put it away without doing it"
Self-Discipline and Regulation Difficulties	"Self-discipline, I do not have it"; "In my mind only I'll make a timetable, but end up pushing all things to the end"

Fear of Judgment and Perfectionism.

Several participants reported that the desire to produce flawless work paralyzed initiation. P1 stated: "I want it to look good; in the process of making it look good, I might not even start it." She further rejected objectively positive feedback — scoring a perfect mark but insisting the evaluator had not read the work carefully — demonstrating deeply internalized self-critical standards. P4 similarly described the inability to begin tasks without ideal conditions: "Whatever I do, I want to do it very perfectly, it should be done in a perfect way,

so I can't do it now." Ihkamuddin et al. (2023) confirmed perfectionism and self-regulation as core internal antecedents of procrastination, while Kulsum and Akshaya (2024) established a strong positive relationship between parental expectations and perfectionistic tendencies in Gen Z.

Low and Varying Self-Efficacy.

A closely related sub-theme was wavering self-efficacy across task domains. P1 expressed existential self-doubt: "Oh my god, I can't even do this one thing right. Will I ever be a successful person in my career?" P6 described task-oriented self-doubt: "I feel like I can't commit myself into something very serious." P8 identified a more fundamental confusion: "I cannot distinguish whether what I am doing is laziness or procrastination." These observations align with Steel's (2007) meta-analytic finding that self-efficacy deficits are among the most powerful predictors of procrastination, and with Ayub et al.'s (2025) finding of a strong positive association between higher procrastination and lower performance. Notably, P9 acknowledged her own capability — "I do have the capability to do better" — while still being unable to act, illustrating the dynamic, situational nature of self-efficacy beliefs described by Hailikari et al. (2021).

Boredom and Task Aversiveness.

Boredom emerged as a potent precipitant. P1 described aversion to repetitive tasks: "Everything was so boring and I'm just like, why would I even want to do this?" and applied the same attitude to routine daily activities: "Eating food is a chore. Everything is a chore." P9 explained: "When I feel boring, I just want to do something which makes me happy." This pattern aligns with Steel's (2007) task aversiveness model. For Gen Z respondents conditioned by social media to expect high stimulation, the relative dullness of academic work is an aversive stimulus whose unpleasantness is amplified by the immediacy of digital alternatives — a dynamic Ghosh and Roy (2025) observed directly in the Indian context.

Mood Regulation and Emotional Avoidance.

Participants commonly described procrastination as a form of emotional coping. P1 reported a recurring cycle: "Keep pushing it away until it becomes like a headache, and then still push it away and then cry about it." P7 described mood-dependence that made productive work nearly impossible: "I have to be in my best mood to get that work done — that mood is never there." P8 acknowledged guilt but continued to procrastinate: "I feel guilty but yet I still put it away without doing it." Zhang et al.'s (2023) longitudinal neuropsychological research identified emotion regulation — specifically cognitive reappraisal — as a strong predictor of procrastination over time, a finding corroborated by Berinsterova et al. (2023).

Self-Discipline and Regulation Difficulties.

Participants openly acknowledged difficulties in maintaining goal-directed effort. P2 lost track of time while scrolling; P6 consistently delayed until deadlines were imminent; P10 described a persistent gap between intention and action: "In my mind only I'll make a timetable, but end up pushing all things to the end." Asani (2023) established that lower self-control consistently predicts procrastination, and Mohan and Athira (2023) identified self-control as the primary predictor of procrastination among 200 young adults. Many participants were acutely aware of this intention–action gap, highlighting the need for skills-based counseling interventions targeting self-regulatory capacity (Steel & Klingsieck, 2016)

Theme 2: Environmental and Digital Reinforcement

Table 3 Theme 2 — Sub-Themes and Keywords

Sub-Theme	Representative Key Phrases
Social Media and Instant Gratification	"100% Instagram. Once I go, I will spend hours"; "Because of social media, so many times we push our work"; "phone is my main distraction"
Digital Escapism and Avoidance	"Started watching anime during exams, completed a series"; "I'm not doing my task but I am being productive somehow"; "let me chill a bit"
Social Expectations and Impression Management	"She will do it — I wanted that impression to be there"; "I did not want to disappoint the person"; "My mom has a lot of expectations"
Productive Procrastination	"Right before my exam day, I will clean my room"; "I'm not doing my task but at the same time I am being productive"
Environmental Structure and Accountability	"Body doubling"; "When my guide becomes very active, I start working"; "If mom is there, my procrastination levels are significantly lower"

Social Media and Instant Gratification.

Social media was the most frequently cited driver of procrastination. P1 characterized platforms as "very stimulating" and found herself watching reels and long-form video instead of studying. P4 admitted: "100% Instagram. Once I go, I will spend hours." P10 noted how social media conversations normalized deferral: "Because of social media, so many times we push our work." These accounts directly align with Ghosh and Roy (2025), who found that procrastination fully mediates escapist inclinations and excessive social media use among 621 Gen Z respondents in India. Sharma and Dahiya (2022) similarly found that 69% of Indian college students were moderately or severely procrastinating as a result of digital entertainment.

Digital Escapism and Avoidance.

Beyond passive scrolling, several participants described active engagement with streaming media as a deliberate escape from academic obligations. P3 completed an entire anime series and a K-drama during the examination period while defining herself as a "multi-tasker," exemplifying the social media escapism theorized by Ghosh and Roy (2025). P7 framed digital consumption as recovery: "I have a tiring day and I think, okay, let me chill a bit," illustrating the blurring boundary between healthy rest and avoidance.

Social Expectations and Impression Management.

Social comparison and reputation management produced paradoxical effects on motivation. P1 explained how her reputation among peers created pressure rather than inspiration: "Among my friends I was somebody who knew more about research — she will do it, and I wanted that impression to be there." P3 cited relational obligation as a factor that drove one timely submission: "I did not want to disappoint the person who did therapy on me." P4 sought to meet others' expectations perfectly, which led to avoidance rather than action. Kulsum and Akshaya (2024) established a positive correlation between parental expectations and perfectionism in Gen Z, consistent with the interpersonal dynamics observed among participants.

Productive Procrastination.

P1 reported replacing priority tasks with perceived productive alternatives — cleaning her room before exams, reading tangentially related literature, rearranging her space — while still avoiding the assigned work: "I'm not doing my task but at the same time I am being productive somehow." Bhutani (2024) observed this form of rationalized procrastination, where proximity to productive activity serves as justification for inactivity. This tendency was notable among high-achieving participants whose identity requires perceived productivity, making pure idleness subjectively unacceptable.

Environmental Structure and Accountability.

Procrastination decreased substantially when external structure was introduced. P1 completed a long-deferred task when a phone call prompted her to stand up, triggering action over habitual inertia. P3 and friends used body doubling — co-presence that made engagement possible where solo effort had failed. P7 found that active follow-up by her research guide produced work that months of self-direction had not; P8 noted that her mother's presence at home significantly reduced her procrastination. This mechanism is supported by Svartdal et al. (2020), who found that structured study environments substantially reduce procrastination, and by Steel and Klingsieck (2016), who identified environmental redesign and accountability structures as effective intervention leverage points.

Theme 3: Identity and Self-Concept Dilemma

Table 4 Theme 3 — Sub-Themes and Keywords

Sub-Theme	Representative Key Phrases
Identity Discrepancy	"I hate being late but still I end up being late — it feels like identity confusion"; "I honestly could do better but chose not to"
Control Beliefs and Internalized Standards	"I can't put the blame anywhere else. It's really in my control. I'm aware but I still choose to continue"; "I know what I am doing. I intentionally procrastinate"
Procrastination as a Self-Concept	"It feels like it's a part of me"; "Friends have started understanding. Family has made peace with it"; "It's become a habit for me. Why should I care?"

Identity Discrepancy.

P1 most clearly articulated the identity dimension of her procrastination: "I hate being late but still I end up being late. It feels like identity confusion. Whole question mark self." Despite considering herself someone who despises lateness — she arrived at college early and never missed personal appointments — she was consistently late with academic submissions, a source of genuine distress. P5 described a similar gap: "I honestly could do better but I chose not to." Arnett (2000) identifies identity exploration as the primary task of emerging adulthood, and the data suggest that habitual procrastination became a destabilizing factor in that process for multiple participants.

Control Beliefs and Internalized Standards.

Several participants demonstrated high internal locus of control, openly stating they procrastinated by choice rather than circumstance. P1 reflected: "I can't put the blame anywhere else. It's really in my control. I'm aware but I still choose to continue." P4 acknowledged: "I know what I am doing. I am aware of it. I intentionally procrastinate." P6

described guilt at failing what she framed as personal responsibility. Mohan and Athira (2023) identified self-control as the primary predictor of procrastination, and these self-diagnoses confirm that among many Gen Z emerging adults the problem lies not in awareness but in volitional implementation — suggesting that interventions should target self-regulatory ability rather than insight alone (Steel & Klingsieck, 2016).

Procrastination as a Self-Concept.

The extent to which procrastination had been internalized as a stable and socially accepted part of identity was clinically significant. P1 stated: "It feels like it's a part of me." P3 gave a hedonistic account: "I want fun right now; I will deal with the consequences later," and observed that her social circle had "started understanding" while her family had "made peace with it." P9 described a state of detached habituation: "It's become a habit for me. Why should I care about it?" Folsom (2024) found that institutional and peer norms play a significant role in either reinforcing or disrupting habitual patterns; when social environments normalize procrastination, the urgency to change diminishes. This identity-level entrenchment warrants particular attention in psychoeducational and counseling practice.

Theme 4: Functional and Academic Consequences

Table 5 Theme 4 — Sub-Themes and Keywords

Sub-Theme	Representative Key Phrases
Academic Performance Impact	"Not one assignment is submitted on time"; "If I didn't procrastinate, I'd have gotten better marks"; "I don't study for the exam. Even on the day"
Cognitive and Performance Impairment	"Cannot bring myself to focus"; "I do put a lot of effort but the time period is not enough"; "I could have attended to that one question I left in the exam"
Time Disorganization	"Had 2–3 days to do it but I sent it around 12:30 or 1 a.m."; "Presentation next day, I do the PPT the same night"; "4, 5, 6, up to 15 days late"

Academic Performance Impact.

Late submission, poor exam preparation, and last-minute performance were nearly universal among participants. P3 reported that not a single assignment during her academic year was submitted on time. P9 turned in work up to 15 days after deadlines and described receiving grades as low as 6 as a consequence. P1 reported group revision occurring on the morning of examinations rather than in the days preceding them. Steel and Klingsieck (2016) confirm that academic procrastination is positively correlated with poor grades, high exam anxiety, and decreased mastery orientation. The systematic review by Ihkamuddin et al. (2023) established that these academic impacts are reproduced across different cultural settings.

Cognitive and Performance Impairment.

Procrastination was also reported to impair the quality of thought during academic work. P1 could not concentrate even during peer group revision on the day of an exam. P9 noted: "I can't concentrate on my works." P8 reflected: "I do put a lot of effort but the time period is not enough." Vangsness et al. (2022) found that behavioral measures of task engagement did not consistently correlate with self-reported procrastination, suggesting that the behavioral deficits under time pressure may be more severe than individuals realize. Zhang et al.'s

(2023) neurological data implicate weakened episodic prospection as a driver — participants may simply fail to mentally simulate future demands in a way that would prompt early action.

Time Disorganization.

Poor time organization was consistently reported. P4 knew she had 2–3 days to complete a task yet submitted at 1 a.m. on the final night; P6 prepared presentation slides the same evening they were due; P9 regularly submitted work 4 to 15 days past deadlines. Mohan and Athira (2023) found that procrastination, time management, and self-control form an interdependent cluster in which deficiency in one exacerbates the others. Maier et al. (2022) added another layer: the sleep disruption caused by bedtime procrastination further depletes self-regulatory resources the following day, creating a compounding cycle of exhaustion and postponement.

Theme 5: Personal and Social Well-Being Impact

Table 6 Theme 5 — Sub-Themes and Keywords

Sub-Theme	Representative Key Phrases
Self-Care Neglect	"I procrastinate going to sleep, washing my face"; "I procrastinate eating. Everything is a chore"; "Every night, 12 o'clock to bathe"
Emotional Distress	"Cry about it"; "A lot of regrets and a lot of self-blame"; "Anxious kind of feeling"; "I feel mentally low"; "I don't feel anything" (emotional numbing)
Social Withdrawal	"Almost invisible" to social circle; "I can see the call but I don't want to talk to them"; "It takes 2–3 weeks to call them"
Relationship Strain	"He was here for one week, but still I was like, dad, next, next, next"; "She gets annoyed — it affects the relationship"; "They deserve my time and respect"

Self-Care Neglect.

Participants reported that procrastinatory patterns extended to fundamental self-care routines. P1 revealed that she had purchased skincare products but could not bring herself to use them and consistently deferred basic tasks such as washing her face, eating, and sleeping. P9 reported delaying hair care and bathing until midnight. P8 described a progressively deteriorating sleep routine due to accumulating last-minute academic work. Bernecker and Job (2020) showed that those who perceive willpower as a limited resource are especially vulnerable to bedtime procrastination after stressful days, contributing to the chronic sleep disturbance observed among participants.

Emotional Distress.

The emotional toll of chronic procrastination was evident throughout the data. P1 reported alternating between apathy and painful self-criticism; P3 described the sequence from detachment to guilt and frustration once time ran out; P6 anticipated regret and self-blame in anticipation of an unprepared examination; P7 described persistent low-grade anxiety and irritability. Most clinically notable was P9's flat affect: "I don't feel anything," which, in context, appeared to reflect emotional numbing consistent with avoidance-based coping. Pandey (2025) found that procrastination exerts a strong positive influence on student anxiety and depressive feelings, and Zhang et al.'s (2023) neuropsychological data

demonstrate that diminished emotion regulation capacity is both a cause and a consequence of procrastination.

Social Withdrawal.

Several participants extended procrastination to social interactions, becoming unwilling to send messages, answer calls, or maintain contact over extended periods. P1 described becoming "almost invisible" to her social circle during the COVID-19 pandemic. P3 reported diverting calls even when she could see them arriving: "I can see the call but I don't want to talk to them. I will call them later." P9 estimated that she took 2–3 weeks to return her siblings' calls. Ferrari et al. (2005) established that social avoidance is a standard correlate of chronic procrastination, with the same avoidant impulse driving both task deferral and relational deferral. This social withdrawal carries particular developmental significance given Arnett's (2000) framing of emerging adulthood as a phase in which social connection and identity are co-created through peer relationships.

Relationship Strain.

Procrastination created practical tension within close relationships for several participants. P2 reported that her mother experienced steady frustration, impacting their relationship. P10's account was particularly poignant: her father traveled to Mangaluru to visit her, yet she repeatedly deferred time with him — "He was here for one week, but still I was like, dad, next, next, next" — acting only once she reframed the situation as a matter of respect rather than desire. These findings are consistent with Ferrari (2010) and underscore the importance of addressing interpersonal and systemic dimensions in any counseling intervention, as recommended by Setiyowati et al. (2020) and Wang et al. (2017).

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that procrastination among Gen Z emerging adults in Mangaluru is a multidimensional, identity-engrained pattern perpetuated by psychological vulnerabilities, digital affordances, and developmental pressures. All ten participants were fully aware of their procrastination yet unable to stop — confirming that the core problem is volitional rather than informational. This aligns with Steel and Klingsieck's (2016) argument that procrastination is fundamentally a self-regulatory failure, and with Sirois and Pychyl's (2013) framing of it as a mood-regulation strategy that prioritizes short-term relief over long-term well-being.

Social media emerged as the most frequently cited external driver. The structural design of platforms — optimizing engagement through variable reward schedules — depletes the same self-regulatory resources already strained by academic and personal demands (Ghosh & Roy, 2025; Rogowska & Cincio, 2024). The normalization of procrastination within peer networks, and the absorption of a procrastinatory self-concept, represents a distinct feature of this sample that goes beyond individual psychology. When social environments endorse delay as acceptable, the cost-benefit analysis of change shifts unfavorably (Folsom, 2024). The application of Gross's (1998) Emotion Regulation Theory is supported by the data. Participants consistently used avoidance rather than cognitive reappraisal as their primary emotional response to aversive tasks, confirming Sirois and Pychyl's (2013) characterization of procrastination as disguised mood repair. The finding that external structure — body doubling, guide accountability, parental presence — reliably reduced procrastination suggests that environmental redesign is a feasible intervention strategy (Steel & Klingsieck, 2016; Svartdal et al., 2020).

Understanding Procrastination Among Gen Z Emerging Adults

The extension of procrastination into self-care and social relationships is consistent with Ferrari et al.'s (2005) broader model of procrastination as a pervasive behavioral pattern rather than a domain-specific habit. The emotional numbing reported by some participants, and the chronic sleep disruption linked to bedtime procrastination (Bernecker & Job, 2020; Maier et al., 2022), points to a self-compounding loop that standard time-management approaches are unlikely to disrupt.

Implications

For Counselors and Mental Health Professionals

Counseling practice should move beyond time-management strategies to also address emotion regulation, perfectionism, and self-concept. Cognitive-behavioral therapy and acceptance and commitment therapy offer established frameworks for challenging thoughts that perpetuate procrastination and for promoting values-based action. Techniques such as body doubling, accountability structures, and environmental restructuring provide targeted support for the structural triggers identified in this study.

For Educational Institutions

Institutions can reduce procrastination by implementing intermediate deadlines, offering distraction-free study environments, and establishing faculty check-in mechanisms. Student support programs should incorporate psychoeducational workshops on self-regulation, digital hygiene, and procrastination awareness. Faculty responses to repeated late submissions should shift from punitive to supportive approaches.

For Policy and Curriculum Design

Counseling, psychology, and social work curricula should include training on Gen Z-specific self-regulation and procrastination challenges. Institutional mental health policy should identify procrastination as a student well-being issue with early identification and referral pathways. Digital literacy programs may help students develop self-regulated patterns of technology use.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study was limited to Gen Z emerging adults aged 18–25 in Mangaluru, which restricts applicability to other age groups and geographic settings. All participants were female, limiting gender representation. The qualitative design does not permit statistical generalization. Future research should employ cross-sectional designs to assess procrastination across diverse life stages, and mixed-methods approaches to combine qualitative depth with quantitative breadth. Studies including male and non-binary participants and drawn from culturally diverse populations would extend the transferability of these findings.

CONCLUSION

Procrastination among Gen Z emerging adults is not a simple habit. It is a multidetermined, identity-engrained pattern perpetuated by psychological vulnerabilities, digital affordances, and developmental pressures. All participants were aware they were procrastinating but were unable to act on that awareness, confirming that the problem is volitional rather than informational. Effective support must address emotion regulation, environmental triggers, identity, and self-concept simultaneously. This study contributes a lived-experience perspective to a literature dominated by quantitative approaches and affirms the value of understanding procrastination from the inside out — as a psychologically meaningful

response to an emotionally overwhelming world — as a prerequisite for developing interventions that genuinely help this generation.

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Conflict of Interest

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