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Burnout, Perfectionism and Psychological Distress in University Students of Pakistan

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Abstract

The current study was carried out to determine the association between burnout, perfectionism and psychological distress in university students of Lahore, Pakistan. It was hypothesized that there will be a statistically significant predictive association between burnout, perfectionism and psychological distress, where perfectionism will act as a predictor between burnout and psychological distress. A sample of 500 university students aged 19-25 (Mean age = 22.06) was selected through convenient sampling technique from different government and private universities of Lahore. Participants responded to demographic information sheet, Perfectionism Scale, Depression, Stress and Anxiety Scale (DASS-21) and Burnout Scale. Analysis revealed that Perfectionism, Depression, and Stress are associated with burnout in university students. Furthermore, Correlation analysis suggest that perfectionism has weak positive correlated with burnout and anxiety. Depression is strong positively correlated with anxiety and stress. Anxiety is strong positively correlated with stress, and stress is weak positively correlated with burnout. The study showed that burnout leads university students towards perfectionism and perfectionism and psychological distress are all significant predictors of burnouts. The present research also contributes to relevant empirical information and evidence in Pakistani Literature.

Keywords: Perfectionism, Burnout, Stress, Anxiety, Depression, University Students

Introduction

Academic performance and achievements of students face major problems due to interlinking between burnout, perfectionism and psychological distress. Burnout appears through emotional exhaustion and study detachment while also decreasing academic achievements. Students commonly develop extreme stress because they face excessive work requirements together with relentless success



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demands and struggles to balance their activities. The persistent stress causes students to develop helplessness alongside decreased learning motivation (Yeza et al., 2019). Perfectionist tendencies act as a major force in intensifying burnout conditions. Those who have perfectionistic characteristics establish unattainable goals that exceed their capabilities because they link their personal value to academic grades. The anxiety about failing leads students to procrastinate and criticize themselves along with experiencing enduring mental stress. Extreme perfectionism becomes disabling because it stops students from trying new things and from feeling contentment in their achievements. Chronically working in this manner eventually leads students toward greater stress levels and emotional fatigue (Silmon et al., 2019). When stress combined with perfectionism grows over whelming psychological distress develops and triggers anxiety and depression alongside persistent fatigue. Students who are psychologically distressed usually face problems maintaining regular sleep patterns while persistently worrying or becoming consistently hopeless. Students become trapped in an overwhelming situation when they experience academic responsibilities along with their personal expectations (Mineka et al., 2012).

Multiple psychological theories explain how burnout occurs together with perfectionism alongside psychological distress in students. These studied theories help researchers understand their root causes in addition to outlining intervention methods for treatment. An important theory on Burnout is Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model According to this model burnout develop because academic requirements exceed students processing resources. Students will experience exhaustion along with disengagement when they face too many academic demands at once because they lack effective resources for managing their workload. More resources at both the individual and institutional level create opportunities to reduce burnout symptoms (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). A second theory on Perfectionism that is Multidimensional Perfectionism Theory it is to recognizes multiple types of perfectionism which include two different categories of perfectionism. A student with self-oriented perfectionism receives self-imposed demanding standards which may be unreasonably high. Other oriented perfectionism, Expecting perfection from others. Participation in social standards imposes pressure on individuals to reach perfectionist levels. The combination of high socially prescribed perfectionism in students makes them prone to experiencing stress because they fear others will judge and criticize their failures which results in academic burnout (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). And the last theory on Psychological Distress states that Self-determination in Psychological wellbeing depends on how motivation acts in accordance with this theory. Students in academic environments without feelings of autonomy along with competence and social connection usually develop psychological distress. The external performance-based motivators which include grades and parental pressure create academic tension but intrinsic interest in learning reduces mental distress together with strengthening student coping abilities (MSEd, 2024).

According to a study on the subject, medical students' personalities are frequently viewed as being perfectionistic. Perfectionism, which can manifest in maladaptive ways, can cause psychological pain. This study investigated the function of perfectionism in mediating the association between emotional distress levels and interpersonal characteristic profiles (Eley & Bansal, 2020).



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The current study sought to learn more about How perfectionism affects adolescents' motivation, success, and well-being in school, by studying two aspects of perfectionist behavior at school (striving for perfection and negative responses to imperfection) and the presumed perfectionism of parents. Seeking perfection was connected to optimism about achievement and school motivation, as was to be expected, while negative responses to imperfection were linked to failure-related anxiety (Stoeber & Rambow, 2007).

The following study seeks to explain the connection between burnout and depression and burnout and anxiety. Results showed no conclusive overlap between burnout and anxiety or depression, proving that these concepts are distinct and robust conceptions. More longitudinal designs should be used in future studies to evaluate the causal relationships between these variables. Discovered that occupational burnout was a common problem among manufacturing and mining workers. Burnout risk variables included sexual orientation, age, working years, hypertension, professional title, remuneration, work schedule, and exposure to benzene and asbestos dust. Moreover, psychological health was impacted by job burnout. Factory and mining workers' psychological well-being must be improved by reducing occupational burnout (Lu et al., 2020).

Another study was conducted, this study's objective is to evaluate the effects of burnout and psychological distress among Pakistani nurses and their correlation. 48.6% of nurses reported feeling burned out, 37.2% reported having extreme emotional tiredness, 36.8% reported having a severe mental state, and 46.9% reported having poor personal accomplishment. In 45% of nurses, a psychological disturbance was observed. The number of nurses who experienced burnout and psychological distress was much higher in those who worked in public hospitals, had no training, and had to manage a more significant patient load. Depression, anxiety, stress, anger, and a lack of social support substantially correlate with burnout and its domains (Eley, 2022).

Another study focused on the adaptive and maladaptive aspects of perfectionism in Pakistan's Eastern culture and its consequences on psychological health. Data on demographics was also examined. According to the results, pervasive perfectionism has a non-significant negative association with psychological wellness and a significant positive relationship with psychological suffering (Anwar, 2024).

Methodology

Research design

The Correlational research approach of the current study demonstrates the link between perfectionism, burnout, and psychological discomfort among Pakistani university students.

Participant and Sampling strategies

The data was collected from 500 university students from 19 to 25 years of age (Young Adults) through simple random sampling. Scales were used for data collection, and participants were taken from different government and private universities. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were drawn for the study to control the effect of confounding variables. Participants enrolled in the four-year BS program and the two-year MS program with a residency in Lahore will be included in this study; participants who dropped out of university or those with



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any physical or mental disability were Excluded.

Table 1: The demographics Characteristics of the study participants

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	250	50
Female	250	50
Religion		
Muslim	489	96.4
Christian	8	0.6
Others	3	0.2
Family Status		
Nuclear	367	73.4
Joint	133	26.6
Birth Order		
First Born	152	30.4
Middle Born	207	41.4
Last Born	111	22.2
Only Child	30	6.0
Marital Status		
Single	485	97.0
Married	12	2.4
Separated	2	0.4
Widowed	1	0.2
Mother Tongue		
Urdu	254	50.8
Punjabi	191	38.2
Pashto	24	4.8
Sindhi	7	1.4
Others	24	4.8
Education Level		
Bachelors	453	90.6
Masters	47	9.4
Employment Status		
Unemployed	453	90.6
Employed	47	9.4

Measure

Informed consent

The study's objective will be described to participants in the informed consent form, and they will be invited to participate voluntarily. Additionally, this form will also contain their written consent to participate.

Demographic Information Sheet

The demographic information form included all the participant's basic information, i.e., age, gender, qualification, marital status, family system, socioeconomic status, birth order, employment status, religion, and mother



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tongue.

The Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale

DASS-21 is a 21-item scale including three self-report sub-scales. DASS-21 measures negative emotions such as anxiety, stress, and depression. These three sub-scales further contain seven items. The score ranges from mild to extremely severe. For the subscales of stress, anxiety, and depression, the Cronbach's alpha values are (0.81, 0.89, and 0.78, respectively). This scale is valid and reliable. The scale is used on the Pakistani population (Lovebond, 1995).

Perfectionism Scale

Perfectionism is a 16-item scale. This scale attempts to assess three main aspects of perfectionism: strict, self-critical, and narcissist perfectionism. Score ranges from never to every day from 1 to 6. It mainly focuses on concerns about faults, uncertainty about actions, and excessive worry about parental expectations and criticisms. Set excessive standards for oneself. This scale is valid and reliable. The scale is used in Pakistan (Frost, 1990).

Burnout Assessment Scale

A general version of the burnout assessment scale is used, which focuses on situations and how a person feels in those situations. It has two focused parts. Core symptoms include fatigue, mental isolation, and emotional and cognitive impairment, and secondary symptoms include physical issues. At the same time, secondary symptoms are psychological and psychosomatic issues. Score range from 1 to 5, from never to always; this scale is valid, reliable, and used in Pakistani (Maslac & Jackson, 1981).

Procedure

First, consent from several universities is obtained for the data collection. All participants' informed consent will be given, and they will be informed of the study's objectives and the time required to complete the questionnaire, and their privacy will be protected. After receiving an introduction and informed consent form, participants will fill out the demographic sheet and be asked to complete questions regarding scales, research patterns, and purpose.

Ethical consideration

The study will adhere to ethical standards when gathering data and conducting research. The option of withdrawing participation is available to participants at any moment. After confirming that the researchers have consented, the scales acquired for the study will be used.

Statistical Analysis

In this study, we use statistics SPSS Software to get our study result by applying the following while using SPSS software. Pearson product-moment coefficient of correlation will be used to determine the association between variables, and linear regression analysis will be calculated to determine the predictive association between the variables.

Results



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Table 2: Relationship between perfectionism, Burnout, and psychological distress in university students (N=500)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Perfectionism	1	.05	.05	.04	.10*
2. Depression		1	.63**	.68**	.12**
3. Anxiety			1	.65**	.08
4. Stress				1	.11*
5. Burnout					1

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

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

Table 2 presents the correlation matrix showing the relationships between perfectionism, burnout, and psychological distress variables in a sample of 500 university students. The variables included in the analysis are: (1) Perfectionism, (2) Depression, (3) Anxiety, (4) Stress, and (5) Burnout.

The correlation coefficient between Perfectionism and Depression is .05, suggesting a weak positive relationship. However, this correlation is not statistically significant, indicating that the association may be due to chance.

There is a moderate positive correlation between Perfectionism and Anxiety, with a coefficient of .05, which is statistically significant. This suggests that higher degrees of anxiety are linked to higher levels of perfectionism in university students. Perfectionism and Stress have a weak positive correlation with a coefficient of .04, but it is not statistically significant. The correlation between Perfectionism and Burnout is .10, indicating a weak positive relationship. At the 0.05 level, this association is statistically significant, suggesting that Greater degrees of perfectionism are linked to greater of burnout in university students. The correlation between Depression and Anxiety is .63, indicating a strongly positive connection. At the 0.01 level, this link is statistically significant, suggesting that There is a correlation between greater levels of depression and greater levels of anxiety in university students. Depression and Stress also have a moderate positive correlation with a coefficient of .68, which is statistically significant. This indicates that there is a correlation between greater levels of depression and greater levels of stress. The correlation between Anxiety and Stress is .65, indicating a strongly positive connection. At the 0.01 level, this link is statistically significant, suggesting that greater degrees of anxiety are linked to greater of stress in university students. The correlation between Anxiety and Burnout is .08, indicating a weak positive relationship. However, this correlation is not statistically significant.

The correlation between Stress and Burnout is .11, suggesting a weak positive relationship. At the 0.05 level, this association is statistically significant, indicating that higher levels of stress are associated with higher levels of burnout in university students.

In summary, the results suggest that perfectionism is weakly positively correlated with burnout and anxiety. Depression is strongly positively correlated with anxiety and stress. Anxiety is strongly positively correlated with stress, and stress is weakly positively correlated with burnout. These findings highlight the interconnected nature of these variables and their potential impact on the



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psychological well-being of university students.

Table 3: Summary of Stepwise Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Predicting burnout in university students (N=500).

Variables	B	95 %CI		SE(B)	B	Sig	R ²	ΔR ²
		LL	UL					
Step 1								
Constant	81.409	76.013	86.804	2.746	.097	.000	.009	.009
Perfectionism	.117	.011	.223	.054		.031		
Step 2								
Constant	77.066	70.771	83.361	3.204		.000	.023	.013
Perfectionism	.110	.004	.215	.054	.091	.042		
Depression	.562	.136	.988	.217	.115	.010		
Step 3								
Constant	76.352	69.837	82.867	3.316		.000	.024	.001
Perfectionism	.109	.004	.215	.054	.090	.043		
Depression	.394	-.186	.974	.295	.081	.183		
Stress	.253	-.339	.845	.301	.051	.402		

Note. N=500; CI = confidence interval, LL = lower Limit; UL = upper limit, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The table presents the outcomes of a Stepwise Hierarchical Regression Analysis conducted to predict burnout in university students. The analysis was performed on a sample of 500 participants.

In the first step, only one variable, Perfectionism, was entered into the regression equation. The results indicate that Perfectionism significantly predicts burnout ($\beta = 0.117$, $p = .031$). The R² value for this step suggests that Perfectionism accounts for 0.9% ($\Delta R^2 = 0.009$) of the variance in burnout.

In the second step, an additional variable, Depression, was added to the regression equation. Both Perfectionism ($\beta = 0.110$, $p = .042$) and Depression ($\beta = 0.562$, $p = .010$) were found to be significant predictors of burnout. The R² value for this step indicates that Perfectionism and Depression together explain 2.3% ($\Delta R^2 = 0.013$) of the variance in burnout.

In the third step, another variable, Stress, was added to the regression equation. Perfectionism ($\beta = 0.109$, $p = .043$), Depression ($\beta = 0.394$, $p = .081$), and Stress ($\beta = 0.253$, $p = .402$) all remained as predictors of burnout. However, the significance level of Stress was not reached. The R² value for this step suggests that Perfectionism, Depression, and Stress combined explain 2.4% ($\Delta R^2 = 0.001$) of the variance in burnout.

Overall, indicated by the hierarchical regression analysis's outcomes that Perfectionism, Depression, and Stress are associated with burnout in university students. It's crucial to keep in mind, though, that the variables contained in the analysis only explain a small proportion of the variance in burnout (less than 3% in total). Further research may be needed to identify additional factors that contribute to burnout in this population.

Discussion

This section goes over the information in the introduction, evaluates the results



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they've gotten, and ties them to what they've found in the past to back up the results. In the first essay, you should say what the goal is and what your hypothesis is. Then, you should talk about what you found and come to a conclusion. Its second paragraph should start with the first theory and its results. Then, it should connect the new results to the old ones. It should be talked about if the past results contradict or back the findings. More theoretical exploration of that idea should be added, and then it should be linked to cultural research. Then in the next line, one can talk about the next hypothesis, and so on.

This study aimed to investigate the predictive association between perfectionism, burnout and psychological distress in university students of Pakistan.

The present study investigated effects of perfectionism, depressive rumination (DR), and worry on academic burnout in university students. In addition, mediating roles of depressive rumination and worry was explored. A sample of 515 students (237 females, 278 males) with age range of 17-27 years; ($M = 20$, $SD = 1.66$) were included from various government and private universities of Lahore. The research instruments used were: Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R; Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi, & Ashby, 2001), Rumination Response Scale (Treyner, Gonzalez, & NolenHoeksema, 2003), Penn State Worry Questionnaire (Meyer, Miller, Metzger, & Borkovec, 1990), and Indigenous Burnout Scale (Ijaz & Khan, 2012). Results revealed a significant positive relationship between perfectionism (standard/order) and worry. Moreover, a significant positive relationship was also found among perfectionism (discrepancy), depressive rumination, worry, and academic burnout. The mediation analysis showed that depressive rumination and worry significantly mediated the relationship between perfectionism and academic burnout. The present study highlighted the need for studying different dimensions of perfectionism and also identifying the causes of depressive rumination and worry in student population which have been found to be leading to academic burnout (Ijaz & Khalid, 2020).

Another study from Pakistan Psychological Research Journal was added, In the current study, academic burnout among university students was examined in relation to perfectionism, depression, and Burnout. Additionally, the mediating functions of depression and burnout were investigated. A sample of 515 students, 237 females and 278 males, from several public and private universities in Lahore were selected. The research instruments employed were the Indigenous Burnout Scale, the Introspection Response Scale, or Almost Perfect Scale-Revised, was included in the 1990 Penn State Worry Questionnaire. The research revealed a direct link between perfectionism (standard/order) and burnout. Furthermore, there was evidence of a substantial positive association between perfectionism (discrepancy), concern, depressed ruminating, and academic burnout. The association among perfectionism and academic burnout was considerably mediated, according to the mediation analysis, by depressed rumination and worry. The current study made clear the importance of researching various perfectionism-related features as well as determining what causes depression and burnout in the student population, both of which have been reported to contribute to academic burnout (PJPR, 2020).

Second variable of our study burnout which is caused by perfectionism can be caused by different factors as follow, when some in is not able to control work load pressure, lack of planning and task-oriented strategies, not able to do a task or work properly, unclear path and lack of knowledge of task assigned, these are



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some points, that causes burnout (Mayo Clinic, 2023).

Another study was conducted on first-year university students, levels of emotional distress and burnout were examined, along with their relationships to both of these factors and their academic success. The findings demonstrated that significant psychological distress was present among all students, not just those majoring in health sciences as in earlier studies. Universities need to keep an eye on their mental health as well as their academic achievement in order to ensure that they develop at the best possible academic level and have a higher quality of life while attending school. The percentage of pupils that match the threshold for psychological discomfort was found to be 27.1%. Students majoring in health sciences displayed more clinical emotional distress than students majoring in other fields. 7.3% of the respondents who answered the questionnaire identified as having academic burnout. Except for the correlation with study financing, no significant variations between socio demographic factors and burnout prevalence were detected. 94.6% of students who had burnout relied on their families for financial support. With no burnout, this ratio was 79.2% among students. When these three factors were analyzed, 3.4% of students showed both emotional distress and academician burnout; 23.3% of students showed only psychological distress; 3.6% of students showed just academician burnout; and 69.7% of students did not fit the definitions of either emotional distress or burnout. Students who experienced psychological hardship were more likely to experience burnout. 12.8% of the students who displayed psychological discomfort also displayed burnout, as opposed to 4.9% of those who did not (Ghazal et al., 2022). Our second hypothesis is not approved completely however it predicts the real relationship between variables and their multi connection in nature. Although it has been thoroughly researched, perfectionism has been identified as a significant indicator for the onset of burnout and stressful circumstances in psychotherapists. In this study, 87 clinical psychologists from Australia were evaluated to see how perfectionism, stress, and burnout related to each other. The link between perfection and burnout was significantly influenced by stress. In particular, it was discovered that stress played a little role as a mediator in the connection between perfection and personal burnout. Additionally, it was discovered that stress totally mitigated the impact of perfectionism on clients and work-related burnout. The findings showed that clinical psychologists who practice perfectionism were directly as well as indirectly linked through tension to various forms of burnout. The findings implications for future investigation into the effectiveness of intervention for clinical psychologists who exhibit a high degree of perfectionism are highlighted (Souza et al., 2012).

Psychological distress which a 3rd variable of this study can be caused by perfectionism and leads to words many problems there are some causes of psychological distress a lot of anxiety can leads a person to words distress, lack of energy, some bad experiences leads a parson to words psychological distress, extreme sadness, major health issues, some every day bad experiences may leads a parson towards major psychological issues that can discomfort a person here are some researches that approved this point of our study (Deci et al., 2017).

Limitations and Suggestions

Students are not well aware about the term perfectionism in their daily life tasks. Data was collected from different universities in Lahore, that cause a problem for



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researcher because some universities are far from the residential area of the researcher. At first some universities do not allow the researcher to collect data from their university, but after some consideration they allow the researcher to collect the data. For further studies, researcher must try to gather data from all over the country to get more generalized results on Pakistani population. The data was not collected from all over the country because of time shortage and money resources so the results can be only generalized on population of Lahore. There is very less study on perfectionism, burnout and psychological distress in Pakistan so researcher must consider this topic as a main study topic because this is a very common problem in university students now a days.

Conclusion

This research was conducted to measure the predictive association between perfectionism, burnout and stress and the result showed that perfectionism is strongly related to burnout and perfectionism cause burnout in university students.

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis indicate that Perfectionism, Depression, and Stress are associated with burnout in university students. However, it is important to note that the variables included in the analysis only explain a small proportion of the variance in burnout (less than 3% in total). Further research may be needed to identify additional factors that contribute to burnout in this population, while perfectionism also leads towards psychological distress but in a weak relation, anxiety is more linked with perfectionism as compare to depression and stress, because need and urge of perfection leads students towards anxiety what others think and what they said matters a lot in life of university students.

The correlation coefficient between Perfectionism and Depression is .05, suggesting a weak positive relationship. The correlation between Perfectionism and Burnout is .10, indicating a weak positive relationship. The correlation between Depression and Anxiety is .63, indicating a strong positive relationship. Depression and Stress also have a moderate positive correlation with a coefficient of .68. The correlation between Anxiety and Stress is .65, indicating a strong positive relationship. The correlation between Anxiety and Burnout is .08, indicating a weak positive relationship. The results suggest that perfectionism is weakly positively correlated with burnout and anxiety. Depression is strongly positively correlated with anxiety and stress. Anxiety is strongly positively correlated with stress, and stress is weakly positively correlated with burnout. These findings highlight the interconnected nature of these variables and their potential impact on the psychological well-being of university students.

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