The Impact of Perfectionism and Academic Burnout among University Students: The Role of Social Support

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ABSTRACT: With an emphasis on the role of social support, the current study attempts to investigate the relationship between university student's academic burnout and perfectionism. High personal standards and self-criticism are main characteristics of perfectionism, have been linked to increased academic stress and burnout, which negatively impact students' mental health and academic performance. Social support, including emotional, informational, and academic assistance from peers, family, and faculty, is proposed as a protective buffer against the harmful effects of perfectionism. The research uses a cross-sectional survey design, with data collected from 300 university students through self-report questionnaires measuring the levels of perfectionism, academic burnout, and perceived social support. Correlation, t-test, and regression were used to analyze the data. The study aims to identify whether social support mitigates the relationship between perfectionism and burnout, offering insights into how universities can enhance student well-being. Findings from this research indicate that perfectionism is positively correlated with academic burnout, whereas social support is negatively correlated with perfectionism and academic burnout. Moreover, Females scored a higher level in perfectionism and its domains as compared to the male students. Results also indicate that perfectionism and social support are significantly predictive of academic burnout. Findings from this research could help to form interventions that promote adaptive perfectionism and strengthen support networks, ultimately reducing burnout and fostering a healthier academic environment.

KEYWORDS: Perfectionism, Academic Burnout, Social Support, University Students

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Introduction

Many students who were at the top of their high school class found themselves disappointed by their academic performance in college and university. This is due to the accumulated effects, as one is usually too burdened down with work and anxious about potentially failing in a required course to succeed fantastically. This is especially true for those students who have entered university based on the grounds of their high school academic achievements, or because their parents or friends expected something from them to be adequately motivated towards study. Thus, it is common that these people find academic work difficult because of a lack of self-motivation and stress (Lee & Jeon, 2015).

In light of the increased number of mental health issues in college students, their psychological wellness is now recognized as a major public health issue (Stallman, 2010). Several studies since the 1980s have proved that going through stress directly increases the chances of experiencing mental and physical illnesses (Kobasa, 1988). Most studies suggest that stress can be a reason for the ongoing and regular activation of body systems that bring on illness or repeated episodes. Long-lasting stress often leads to tiredness, which can result in problems affecting both our physical and mental health. As Dick points out in 1992, anybody who can't get used to continual environmental and mental pressures eventually experiences burnout. The many physical, emotional, and mental issues caused by long-term stress in the environment can make burnout an illness.

Schaufeli et al. (1974) believe that burnout syndrome is not counted as a mental disorder at first, but can eventually become an actual mental disability. First, the concept of burnout looked at how individuals in social work, such as child protection workers, related to one another (Maslach, 2001; Fredenberger, 1974). According to Maslach & Jackson (1981), emotional fatigue, depersonalization, and lowered individuality together form the condition called burnout disorder. Too much emotional fatigue is a major part of what happens with burnout disorder. In addition, signs of burnout turned up in environments like marriage, sports, and academic work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Certain research has shown that students may suffer from burnout (Meier & Schmeck, 1985). School students can feel burnout because of tiredness caused by their studies, a lack of motivation for their tasks, and feelings of not being skilled enough (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Wardle and Mayorga (2016) compared nurses, counselors, coaches, and students in terms of burnout and found that students score highest. The results demonstrate that students feel a great deal of burnout during their education. Being a youth today means dealing with multiple tasks like school work, a job, eating right, keeping healthy, getting enough sleep, and attending to their family and social lives. Students sense that they are unable to handle all these responsibilities, such as stress could eat away at their learning performance and affect their health (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003). Stress is a key reason why people battling burnout often feel exhausted emotionally, start to be cynical, and feel inadequate (Chang et al., 2020; Ljubin-Golub et al., 2020).

Taking on too much at school can cause students to feel continual stress, and it can be hard to manage different areas of their lives. The demands of work or school exceed our abilities and liking; it can destroy our self-esteem and result in resentment, both inside and outside of work (Bretland & Thorsteinsson, 2015). It leads to a decline in students' happiness and is related to school failure, leaving school early, more stress, and depression (Cheung & Li, 2019; Deniz et al., 2014). In their research on students in Finnish colleges, Salmera-Aro & Read (2017) learned that spending more time in education greatly boosted the risk of students experiencing academic burnout.

Since burnout can do a lot of harm, we have to find out which factors make university students more likely to suffer from it (Hill & Curran, 2016). In recent years, perfectionism has attracted a lot of attention when it comes to studying burnout (Hill & Curran, 2016). Being a perfectionist causes individuals to continually work very hard and harshly evaluate their performance. It has been found that scientific studies link perfectionism with burnout (Hill & Curran, 2016). Perfectionism means having a personality type that aims for perfection. It happens when someone aims for perfection in their work and meets high standards, but usually does not achieve them, so they feel fearful and blame themselves (Chang et al., 2020).

During the last several decades, more university students have been facing perfectionist tendencies. As job opportunities have gotten more competitive, students are expected to raise their standards and press themselves harder, experts suggest (Curran & Hill, 2019). Geranmayepour & Besharat (2010) have found that perfectionism is related to psychological problems. Even now, perfectionism can be approached through personal, interpersonal, maladaptive, and adaptive lenses (Bieling et al., 2004; Chang et al., 2020; Frost et al., 1990). Earlier studies by Hamachek in 1978, particularly forms of perfectionism, were thought to help reach important goals and focus on quality work. Hamachek used "normal perfectionism" for the helpful type and called the harmful type "neurotic perfectionism". Consider that there is a normal/healthy form of perfectionism and a much less healthy form that people may have. They believe, using a behavioral model, that healthy perfectionism is encouraged by praise and recognition. To be clear, wanting to do one's best and achieving results often comes without causing psychological distress. However, maladaptive perfectionism is thought to encourage negative reinforcement and unhelpful behaviors according to Slade & Owens (1998).

Earlier studies have found that perfectionism raises the chances of academic burnout. According to recent thinking, perfectionism can be understood through two major aspects: maladaptive perfectionistic concerns, tied to aiming to avoid learning, and positive perfectionistic striving, which has been linked with learning goals (Bieling et al., 2004; Chang et al., 2020; Frost et al., 1990).

People with perfectionistic magnitudes often want perfection from themselves, judge others by the same standards, or feel pressure to meet others' expectations of perfection (Bieling et al., 2004). Because of their high standards, perfectionists usually struggle with communication anxiety, social anxiety, and impostor syndrome and rely on looking good to others, staying unnoticed, and escaping possible criticism and rejection (Cowie et al., 2018).

Sarason (1988) thinks that some things may impact how stress and illness are related and sometimes make matters worse. Personality, how someone copes, their earlier experiences, and the amount of social support they have can all confound the effects of stress during difficult situations. Cobb (1987) believed that social support describes how much care, regard, love, and help a person receives from others. Mitchell and Trickett (1980) suggested that social help has two main aspects: the use of conversational language and its functioning.

Cutrona and Suhr (1992) identify five main categories in their classification system, and informational assistance means providing communications that provide facts or realities and sometimes guidance on actions. Caring, concern, empathy, and compassion are all ways we describe emotional support. This kind of support focuses on improving someone's skills, innate worth, and confidence. Social Network Support is informal organization support and refers to communications that make someone feel connected to others with like passions or circumstances. Physical Assistance in Program means to help by supplying both the labor required and the necessary materials.

Among all possible factors that could be used in the explanation of burnout, social support has proven to be one of the influential factors (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Low social support is the main cause of high chances of burnout (Halbesleben, 2010). Many recent studies show that access to social support makes effective coping with stress much easier (Chang et al., 2020; Yildirim, 2020; Szczygiel & Mikolajczak, 2018). After the people have lost meaningful social relationships, they will be more prone to negative feelings provoked by

burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Kim & Stoner, 2008). Good social support is a key factor in protecting the academically and occupationally stressed against emotional and physical outcomes (Zhou et al., 2022; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021).

Experts believe that social support helps to protect individuals against feeling stressed. According to a study, social encouragement helps to control stress. Lu (1997) considers that receiving social support reduces the impact of stress and encourages us to feel happier. Getting the right kind of social support helps people stay healthy and avoid harmful effects from stressful events. In addition, research tries to find out which personality traits relate to burnout and mental stress (Cano-Garcia, 2005). Being a perfectionist is linked to stress, arguments, and burnout, and it helps to promote pressure and feelings of being overworked (Friedman, 2000; Hewitt & Hallaett, 1995).

Need and Significance of the Research

The present research focused on exploring the ties between perfectionism, academic burnout, and social support among students at university. Due to more academic stress, many students at university often become very perfectionistic, which can have a negative effect on their mental well-being. Being highly perfectionistic can lead to problems in school, lower motivation, and reduced satisfaction with life, but social support can mean these issues are less likely to happen. Discovering the role it plays in burnout can suggest good coping strategies for students. It is important to use research to find out how these variables are related. When we understand how these problems develop, we can design ways to help with the difficulties students deal with. Perfectionists often ask too much of themselves, resulting in anxiety and depression (Flett & Hewitt, 2005). Meanwhile, academic burnout, which involves feeling both mentally and physically tired, has grown to impact many students, harming their ability to focus on school (Maslach et al., 1982).

Objectives of the Research

1. To examine the relationship between perfectionism and academic burnout among university students
2. To examine the relationship between academic burnout and social support among university students

Hypotheses of the Research

1. Female university students will experience a greater perfectionism level than male university students.
2. To find the predictive role of perfectionism on academic burnout among university students
3. Social support will be a significant predictor of academic burnout among university students

Methodology

Research Design

A quantitative correlational research design was used to determine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables using the survey method. The three variables, perfectionism, academic burnout, and social support, were studied in a correlational study.

Population

The target population for the current study consisted of university students enrolled in undergraduate and graduation programs.

Sampling Technique

The stratified sampling technique was used to collect data from the sample. The sample was selected on the basis of strata of programs, semesters, and gender.

Sample

For the current study, a sample was extracted from the population of students of the University of Gujrat. The age range of the sample was from 18 to 25 years. A sample of 300 students was extracted for the target population. The sample was varied across their socioeconomic status, occupation, gender, race, education, etc.

Inclusion Criteria

Currently enrolled university students between the ages of 18 and 25 years.

Exclusion Criteria

Students with any kind of physical or mental illness were excluded from the study.

Instruments

Demographic Form: The demographic scale was formed to get the basic demographic information about the subjects who participated in the research. In this scale, age, gender, marital status, residential area, family system, and education will be asked.

Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS): The FMPS (Stober, 1998) had 20 items measuring personal standards, worry about mistakes, and uncertainty about actions. A person can rank their agreement on a scale going from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree. The scale's score can be between 35 and 175; higher scores generally mean higher perfectionism in individuals, and lower scores mean the opposite.

Maslach Burnout Inventory - Student Survey (MBI-SS): Risk of academic burnout was measured using the MBI-SS (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The MBI-SS has 15 questions that explore the participant's opinion of their studies and is comprised of three scales: exhaustion, cynicism, and efficacy.

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS): Zimet et al. (1988) introduced the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support to measure perceived support from family, friends, and significant others. Items are marked on a seven-point scale, with ratings ranging from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree), and the range for each participant's total points is twelve to eighty-four. Cronbach's alpha measures for the Family, Friends, and Significant Others subscales are all high:.87, .85 and .91, respectively.

Procedure

The research was conducted after the approval of the relevant department and after taking permission for the scales from the authors. Data was collected by the survey method, and where needed to the participants guidance was provided. The questionnaires were distributed to the sample of the University of Gujrat, and data were collected. The collected data was analyzed using SPSS.

Analysis

Statistical Analysis Statistical Package for Social Sciences SPSS 24 version was used for conducting data analysis. Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis was used for computing results. Descriptive statistic was used for investigating frequencies and percentages. Inferential statistics was used for testing hypotheses and other objectives of the study.

Ethical Consideration

Ethics of research were followed in the study. Permission was taken from the authorities. Scales were used in the study after taking appropriate and documented permission from the authors. Participants' consent was also taken to ensure their willingness. Their privacy and confidentiality were maintained. Participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of provided information, and the right to withdraw from the study. It was ensured that the data was only used for research purposes.

Results

Table 1

Demographics of the Sample (N=300)

Demographics		N
Gender	Male	152
	Female	148
Residence Area	Urban	175
	Rural	125
Education	Intermediate	125
	Under graduation	145
	Graduation	30
Socioeconomic Status	Lower Class	7
	Middle Class	268
	Upper Class	25
Family System	Joint	92
	Nuclear	208

The above shows that there are significant differences between several demographics.

Table 2

Correlation between Perfectionism, Academic Burnout, and Social Support

Variables	1	2	3	M	S. D
1. Perfectionism	-	.29**	-.14**	36.27	6.62
2. Academic Burnout		-	-.50**	16.06	4.40
3. Social Support			-	62.45	7.64

Note: **= p< 0.01, M = Mean, S.D = Standard Deviation

In order to test this hypothesis, a correlation analysis was carried out to find the relationship between variables. Results shows that there is a statistically significant and positive relationship between perfectionism and academic burnout (r = 29), but shows negative and significant relationship between perfectionism and social support (r = -.14). Results also show that there is a negative but statistically significant correlation between academic burnout and social support (r = -.50).

Table 3

Gender differences in Perfectionism and its dimensions among university students

	Female		Male		Z	U	Sig (2-tailed)
	N	Mean Rank	N	Mean Rank			
Perfectionism	148	55.73	152	45.47	-1.77	9993.00	.04
SOP	148	58.38	152	42.93	-2.67	863.50	.00
OOP	148	51.84	152	49.22	-.45	1184.00	.03
SPP	148	54.48	152	43.81	-.87	1014.00	.02

Note: SOP = Self-Oriented Perfectionism, OOP = Other-Oriented Perfectionism, SPP = Socially-Prescribed Perfectionism

An independent sample T-test was used to study the gender differences in Perfectionism and its dimensions among university students. Results are shown in the table above. Results indicate that there is a significant difference present in female (Mean Rank = 55.73) and male (Mean Rank = 45.47) Z = -1.77, p = .04 (p < .05) in Perfectionism. As of self-oriented Perfectionism, there is also a significant difference in female (Mean Rank = 58.38) and male (Mean Rank = 42.93) Z = -2.67, p = .00 (p < .05). The Table also reveals that there is a significant difference in other-oriented perfectionism among males and females. Results show that female scores are high (Mean Rank = 51.84) as compare to the scores of males (Mean Rank = 49.22) Z = -.452, p = 0.3 (p < .05). In socially prescribed perfectionism, females (Mean Rank = 54.48) and males (Mean Rank = 43.81) are showing significant differences Z = -.87, p = 0.02 (p < .05).

Table 4

Predicting the Effect of Perfectionism on Academic Burnout among University Students

Model Summary			ANOVA		Coefficient			
					Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	
R	R²	Adj R²	F	P	SE	B	B	T
.26	.06	.06	14.42	.00	6.17	.20	.26	17.09

To find out the predictive role of perfectionism on academic burnout, Linear regression analysis was carried out. The above table shows that perfectionism predicts academic burnout in students; this explains that if the perfectionism level increases by 1point, academic burnout will change by .26. The positive relationship contributes 6% of the variance in academic burnout among students.

Table 5

Predicting the effect of Social Support on academic burnout among university students

Model Summary			ANOVA		Coefficient			
					Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	
R	R²	Adj R²	F	P	SE	B	B	R
.28	.08	.08	27.03	.00	.07	.36	.28	5.20

To find out the predictive role of social support on academic burnout, Linear regression analysis was carried out. The above table shows that social support predicts academic burnout in students; this explains that if the perfectionism level increases by 1point, academic burnout will change by .28. The positive relationship contributes 8% of the variance in academic burnout among students.

Discussion

The current study aimed to explore the relationship between variables (Perfectionism, academic burnout, and social support) among university students. Gender differences were also found. It explores the predictive effect on academic burnout among students.

The first and second objectives of the current study were there is a correlation between perfectionism, academic burnout, and social support among university students. Results indicated a strong and meaningful link between perfectionism and academic burnout, but a strong and important connection in the opposite direction between perfectionism and social support, as shown in Table 2. The findings match those seen in earlier studies. Researchers Flett & Hewitt (2005) showed that perfectionism predicts a greater risk of academic burnout. According to the findings, students who aim for perfection usually stress more because they worry about failing and set overly high goals for themselves. Perfectionism was discovered to be related to higher levels of academic burnout (Rys & Spada, 2021). Researchers looked into how university students with perfectionism, burning out academically, and managing their feelings were related. Results showed that having high perfectionistic tendencies increased burnout and difficulties in controlling emotions made the symptoms worse (Kyeong & Cho, 2023). Experts discovered that people who are perfectionists tend to suffer greater burnout, though social support helps protect against this. A stronger social network made people less likely to show signs of perfectionism and burnout. Reduced burnout effects of perfectionism were observed mostly in cases where people had a supportive social life (Hill et al., 2004).

The first hypothesis of the study was that female university students would experience a greater perfectionism level than male university students. The results from this study back up the hypothesis. Rhees (2024) conducted a longitudinal study looking at the link between perfectionism and college students' grades. It turned out that women reported higher levels of self-oriented perfectionism, and this was linked to more experiences of stress and worries related to perfectionism at school. Both sexes were quite perfectionistic, though it made a bigger difference in women's academic success. Studies have also pointed out that perfectionism in Female students is tied to strong demands to do well in school and with others, which raises their stress and risk of academic burnout. Male participants were less likely than female participants to show the harmful effects of perfectionism, such as increased stress and burnout.

The second and third hypotheses of the current study were to find out the predictive role of perfectionism and social support on academic burnout among university students. Findings from this study and what has been written before support the chosen hypothesis. Ólafsdóttir carried out a study in 2022 to examine how perfectionism affected academic burnout in university students, paying attention to the role of coping strategies. The analysis found that perfectionism is strongly associated with academic burnout. Specifically, those students who displayed high perfectionism used negative ways to cope (avoidance and rumination), which led to greater burnout. Students with perfectionism focus too much on doing well and might organize

things to ensure they act on these thoughts. They could end up spending a lot of time thinking about a task and asking themselves if it meets their high expectations. When they leave their work for the last moment, they tire themselves out from constant worry about their work not going well, which negatively impacts their academic achievements. It was also found that those who worked towards perfection often ended up with academic burnout when they experienced a lot of pressure at school and didn't get enough social support. It was suggested that having social support may protect people from the harmful effects that perfectionism has on burnout (Sirois et al., 2016).

Limitations

Despite the significance of these findings, it must be seen in the context of the study's limitations. Because the study was cross-sectional and used only one source of self-reports, some popular concerns should be mentioned. It is possible that people taking self-report questionnaires will present themselves in a better way to make a good impression. This could happen most to individuals high in perfectionism, who prefer to downplay hardship. The research concerned a group of university students all going through similar life changes within a short period. Their findings could be more generalizable if researchers applied them to different age groups. The sample included only a limited number and could be better by increasing the number.

Recommendations

It is recommended that universities put into practice programs aimed at promoting healthy perfectionism among their students, according to the current study's findings. Nearly all workshops and counseling services teach adaptive perfectionism and remind students to be kind to themselves and set realistic goals. Although the research studied family, friends, and faculty support, it omits the role of online communities and the effectiveness of the support. The researchers studied perceived support, but this doesn't necessarily show actual support or the situations in which help is needed. For further research, qualitative methods or detailed types of support could be studied. It would be helpful for future studies to use designs where participants are followed over time, to more clearly see how perfectionism, academic burnout, and social support influence one another throughout a student's academic life. This, in turn, would clarify links among things and help with planning strong intervention strategies.

Conclusion

This study is designed to examine the association between perfectionism, academic burnout, and the role that social support plays for university students. Because perfectionism is usually linked to bright grades, it can also create the biggest danger for academic burnout, with exhaustion and distancing from studies. However, any support from peers, family, or faculty often minimizes the bad outcomes of perfectionism thanks to the emotional security, help, and resources it offers.

Its findings suggest wider strategies for social support in lowering the impacts of academic burnout on students. With knowledge of how support helps, universities can design new strategies to increase both a student's well-being and their ability to cope academically. In order to address academic pressure and prevent stress, students may benefit from programs expected to help with social skills, better coping skills, and healthy ambitions.

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