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## Perfectionism and Academic Stress in Undergraduate and Post Graduate Students

Now a days literacy rate is increasing in comparison to previous years. This makes the competition level very tough in between students. Competition has certain standards assigned for the activities, this leads the student to focus more on their best ability and attain perfection. This thought and effort to maintain the standard puts them under stress. College life is totally different from high school life. High school life guides you metamorphose from a teenager to an adult. While, college life is an experience which teaches to balance, manage and take responsibilities. College also helps one realize what they want to be in life. There is no need for children going to school to plan or schedule their life. They don't have much worries because their time and schedules are decided by others. They are under the protection of their parents. They have someone to help and guide them always. Still, they need to compete in studies and extracurricular activities. They even need to learn subjects of not their interest. In case of college students, most of them are away from their home. So, they have to take care of themselves. They are owner of their own time. They have to manage all things by themselves, make plans and decisions. While keeping up their best performance at the same time. One advantage of college over school is they only have to undergo a course of their choice. Students like college environment because they will get their own freedom and various opportunities. But, college life is not all fun. They need to do in depth learning, work a lot to understand the subject, go through high level of competition, striving to achieve or maintain the standard fixed. The main tool for managing all activities and control stress is to balance between the academic and personal activities. There is a great change in transition of school life to college life which take more effort and hard work.

### PERFECTIONISM

Perfectionism has been defined as the tendency to set and to pursue unrealistically high goals and standards for oneself across many domains (Hewitt & Flett, 1991a, 1991b). There are studies which shows perfectionism is a multidimensional concept containing three dimensions: self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism, and socially-prescribed perfectionism. According to Hewitt and Flett (1991a), self-oriented perfectionists tend to set and to pursue rigid and unrealistically high standards for themselves, and to undertake stringent self-appraisal in an attempt to attain perfectionism and to avoid failure. Other-oriented perfectionists hold unrealistic standards for significant others, place importance on other individuals being perfect, and evaluate others' behavior accordingly. Socially prescribed perfectionists believe that significant others (e.g., friends, family, professors, and classmates) hold unrealistic standards for them,

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rigorously evaluate them, and pressure them to be perfect. Individuals with high levels of perfectionism are characterized by striving for flawlessness and setting of excessively high standards for performance accompanied by tendencies for overly critical evaluations of their behavior (Flett & Hewitt, 2002; Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990). This may have positive and negative consequences: While setting high standards may have positive consequences such as higher motivation and higher achievement (Bieling, Israeli, Smith, & Antony, 2003), being overly self-critical may reduce well-being and put individuals at risk for depression (Dunkley, Blankstein, Masheb, & Grilo, 2006). Consequently, when investigating perfectionism, it is important to differentiate between two major dimensions of perfectionism (Frost, Heimberg, Holt, Mattia, & Neubauer, 1993; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). On the one hand, there is the positive dimension of perfectionistic striving representing perfectionists' high standards for performance. This dimension has also been described as normal, healthy, or adaptive perfectionism. On the other hand, there is the negative dimension of perfectionistic concerns representing perfectionists' negative attitudes towards mistakes, harsh self-criticism, and feelings of discrepancy between performance and expectations. This dimension has also been described as neurotic, unhealthy, or maladaptive perfectionism (Hamachek, 1978; Rice, Ashby, & Slaney, 1998; Stumpf & Parker, 2000; Terry-Short, Owens, Slade, & Dewey, 1995). In a recent review on the differences between these two dimensions (Stoeber & Otto, 2006), the perfectionistic strivings dimension was found to be related to positive characteristics such as conscientiousness, endurance, positive affect, and satisfaction with life. Moreover, it was found to be related to academic achievement, regarding both specific exams and overall academic performance: College students with higher levels of perfectionistic strivings received higher grades in a mid-term exam than those with lower levels of perfectionistic strivings (Bieling et al., 2003). Furthermore, students classified as adaptive perfectionists (high perfectionistic strivings and low perfectionistic concerns) showed a higher grade point average than maladaptive perfectionists (high perfectionistic strivings and high perfectionistic concerns) and nonperfectionists (low perfectionistic strivings) (Grzegorek, Slaney, Franze, & Rice, 2004; Rice & Slaney, 2002). In contrast, the perfectionistic concerns dimension was found to be related only to negative characteristics, the most prominent of these being depression and anxiety (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Adler (1956) contended that striving for perfection by individuals to maximize their talent or potential constitutes a major aspect of healthy human development. Outcomes of this striving only become negative when the setting and attainment of high standards is born out of inferiority feelings or as a necessary prerequisite for enhanced feelings of self-worth (Ashby & Kottman, 1996). Establishing high standards also is in line with Maslow's (1970) concept of self-actualization is an indicator of positive mental health rather than psychological distress (Parker, 1997). Researchers from this perspective thus believe that setting high personal standards and negative mental health should not always be viewed as mutually inclusive (Accordino, Accordino, & Slaney, 2000; Parker, 2000)

## ACADEMIC STRESS

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Stress has been with mankind ever since the beginning of human life. To facilitate survival, individuals had to fight each other, withstand the elements and obtain food through great effort. Those who were successful in handling stress lived; those who were not successful died. Charles Darwin understood that stressful experiences affect different individuals in different ways. Definition of stress provided by Taylor (2003) as, 'Stress is the process of appraising events (as harmful, threatening, or challenging), of assessing potential responses, and of responding to those events; responses may include physiological, cognitive, emotional and behavioural changes'(p.192). Academic stress refers to the unpleasant psychological situations that occur due to the educational expectations from parents, teachers, peers and family members, pressure of parents for academic achievement, present educational and examination system, burden of Home work etc. Academic stress is a mental distress with respect to some anticipated frustration associated with academic failure or even an awareness of possibility of such failure (Gupta and Khan, 1987) . Academic Stress among students have long been researched on, and researchers have identified stressors as too many assignments, competitions with other students, failures and poor relationships with other students or lecturers. Academic problems have been reported to be most common source of stress for students. Stress in family like divorce, intrapersonal conflicts and maternal depression leads to stress in the adolescents which deteriorates functioning (Rex Forehand et al, 1991). Schafer (1996) observed that the most irritating daily hassles were usually school-related stressors such as constant pressure of studying, too little time, writing term papers, taking tests, future plans and boring instructor. Students experienced academic stress arising from both their own expectations to excel as well as expectations arising from their parents and teachers (Ang and Huan, 2006). There are various coping strategies used by students when experiencing academic stress. Some resort to avoidant coping; alcohol/drug abuse, denial and behavioral disengagement; while others cope actively through acceptance, planning, and positive reframing and taking the necessary steps to overcome the academic stress (Sree rama reddy et al., 2007) .

## **THEORY OF LEARNT HELPLESSNESS**

According to this theory, when a person's efforts to control an event repeatedly fail to yield any result, the person would automatically cease to strive for that particular outcome, and feel a sense of helplessness. People, who cannot get out of one painful situation after another, learn to exhibit apathy lack of interest and inability to learn new responses that would allow them to avoid other difficult situations. These findings showed that when effort to escape or control a situation repeatedly fail, people and animals learn to be helpless. Seligman and his colleagues maintained that learnt helplessness creates three deficits. The first is motivational, in that the helpless person makes no effort to take the steps necessary to change the outcomes. The second is cognitive, in that the helpless person fails to learn new responses that could help him avoid the aversive outcomes. The third is emotional, in learnt helplessness can produce mild or

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severe depression. Seligman and his colleagues called this the reactive depression in humans. Seligman also proposed that when individuals encounter an uncontrollable aversive event, they ask themselves why. The answer people give to this question- the causal attribution- sets the boundaries for the help that follows. Three dimensions of causal attribution were claimed to be important. If the recognized causes were stable (it is going to last forever') rather than unstable, then helplessness would be long lasting, If it were global (it is going to weaken everything) rather than specific, then helplessness would be general. And if the causal attribution were internal (it is me') rather than external, then helplessness would be accompanied by a loss of self-esteem. This attributional analysis of learnt helplessness helps to understand why uncontrollable events are more stressful than controllable ones. A person who attributes his or her lack of effect to constant, unmodifiable factors will believe that no personal effort can remedy the situation. Thus, he or she will perceive his or her resources to be insufficient to meet stressful circumstances, and this will produce more subjective stress. This model also leads to the assumption that when a person feels that he or she has more control over a stressful event, the reasons for the cause of the event will be changed. The belief that a desired outcome can be brought about restored and this can lead to a reversal of the cognitive, motivational and behavioural deficits associated with helplessness.

## THE TRANSACTIONAL MODEL OF STRESS

The Transactional Model of stress is a model of psychological processes involved in stress, which was developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). In this model, stress is perceived as an individual's cognitive interpretation of potentially 5 stressful events. The emphasis here lies more on how the events are perceived rather than the objective events themselves. It has been argued that stress is neither an environmental stimulus nor a psychological response; rather it is a relationship between environmental demands and the ability to deal with them. Because stress is usually perceived as a transaction between individual and environment, there are two important processes that constitute this transaction the psychological appraisal and coping respectively. The psychological appraisal is viewed as the individuals' constant assessment of the situation and the resources available in order to deal with it (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). However, when individuals encounter a potentially stressful situation, they appraise the amount of potential danger as well as their resources for dealing with the danger. Moreover, individuals experience stress when the perceived threat exceeds perceived available resources for coping with it. Lazarus (1978) regards coping as individuals' cognitive and behavioural efforts, which they use to deal with a stressful situation. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress is a dynamic process involving individuals and environment. However, the environment provides the initial stimulus, but the key determinants of stress are the way individuals perceive the environment and how they use the coping resources available to deal with it. This approach is appropriate to this study, because the dynamic relationship between the person and the environment in stress perception and reaction is especially magnified in the first year

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undergraduate students (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). However, the problems and situations encountered by the first year undergraduate students may differ from those faced by their no students' peers or those in the final year (Lazarus & Folkman 1984).

## NEED FOR THE STUDY

In the present situation, academic stress is more commonly seen in colleges. This topic is one of the most significant and commonly found problem in today's Academic life. Now Students not only focus on the submission date but also focus on the perfectionism of the work for avoiding failure because the competition level become high. This leading them to stressful situations. Through this study, the purpose is to determine the relation between perfectionism and academic stress in UG and PG students. Based on the scores of the subjects, interventions can be given in order to help them regulate their academic life in a proper way. If the student is helped to deal with academic life more effectively they can improve their academic performance as well as enjoy the life. If this study proved that there were significant relationship between the variables, it provides information about student's academic stress, and may beneficial to quite a lot of students, teachers, parents, and also in Education system.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In a research ( Bahtiyar Eraslan Capan, 2010) among 230 that is 164 females and 66 males attending Anadolu university- Faculty of Education in spring semester of 2007-2008 School Year to study whether the perfectionist personality trait in university students predicts their academic procrastinations and life satisfactions. Regression analysis is used for the study and the finding is self-oriented perfectionist personality trait significantly predicted academic procrastination and life satisfaction. In a research study (Chang, Edward C.; Banks, Kira Hudson; and Watkins, Angela F, 2004) How Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism Relate to Positive and Negative Psychological Functioning: Testing a Stress-Mediation Model in Black and White Female College Students. A sample of 150 Black and 150 White female students were taken and they used survey method in this study. Findings are comparative result showing Black women as compared with White women, reported less adaptive perfectionism, less life satisfaction, greater stress and greater negative affect. Correlational results indicated that for both groups maladaptive perfectionism but not adaptive perfectionism was associated with stress. In another research (A. Mouratidis, A. Michou, 2011) the aim of the study sequence of relations between dimensions of perfectionism, autonomous and controlled motivation, and coping (Study 1) or exerted effort (Study 2) during training. Cross-sectional (Study 1), short-term longitudinal (Study 2) designs used in this study. In study 1 333 Greek adolescent athletes and in study 2 63 adolescent athletes wew participated. The results of both studies are structural equation modeling revealed that personal standards were positively related to both autonomous and controlled motivation and that concern over mistakes were uniquely related to controlled

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motivation. In turn, autonomous motivation, as compared to controlled motivation, was linked with better coping (Study1) and more effort (Study 2). The research (Purna Prabhakar Nandamuri and Gowthami Ch, 2014) conducted among 500 postgraduate management students from different management institutes. Data was collected through self designed academic stress questionnaire based on previous models available. Among all the stressors the result is high in curriculum and instruction aspect responsible for stress. In a research study (Gladys Nakalema, Joseph Ssenyonga, 2013) Academic Stress: Its Causes and Results at a Ugandan University. They used a sample of 196 (113 males and 83 females) undergraduates of Mbarara University of Science and Technology in Uganda. Cross-sectional survey research design is used in this research. Findings showed that daily academic hassles were found to be the most stressful while personal problems were reported as the least stressful. First year students experienced greater academic stress from financial hardships, academic overload/time and social expectations than the continuing students.

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