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A STUDY OF PERFECTIONISM AND SELF-HARM IN MEDICAL AND NURSING STUDENTS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT

Department of Clinical Psychology, University of Management and Technology, Lahore

Address for correspondence:

Sana Fatima
Department of Clinical Psychology, University of Management and Technology, Lahore

E-mail:

sana.fatima@umt.edu.pk

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Sana Fatima✉, Aqsa Shams, Sadia Saleem, Sayyeda Taskeen Zahra

ABSTRACT

Objective: To find out the mediating role of perceived social support between perfectionism and self-harm in medical and nursing students.

Methodology: This Cross-sectional research design using questionnaires was conducted in the government and private medical universities of Pakistan (Lahore). The total 250 number of participants were chosen by using multi-stage sampling techniques, in which two strata were made, MBBS (145) and nursing students (105). The participants belonged to private and government sector with the age range 18-25 years. There are different characteristics of students that, these students had sense of responsibility, compassionate with their work and they are truthfulness to commitments. To determine the association, Perfectionistic Tendencies Scale (PTS), Multidimensional Perceived Social Support (MDSPSS) and Self-harm Tendencies Scales (SHTS) were used respectively. Statistical results of this research were analysed by using SPSS.

Results. The findings highlighted that there was a significant positive association between perfectionism and self-harm tendencies ($r=.171$, $p=.05$) in students. Respectively, mediation analysis showed that perceived social support is significantly mediated between perfectionism and self-harm tendencies in students ($\beta = .21$, $SE = .08$, $p < .001$)

Conclusion: Perceived social support act as significant shield for perfectionists to prevent from self-harm and mental health issues.

Keywords: Perfectionism; Perceived Social Support; Self-Harm.

INTRODUCTION

Though medical field has been revolutionized with new technologies and advancements, yet people related to medical field tend to experience many challenges and issues¹ predominately related to academic stress, physical and mental health problems. Although, medical/nursing students are in adulthood and due to tremendous academic pressures, they may indulge into self-harm behaviors and which may lead to suicidal thoughts and attempts.² The reason behind increasing self-harm tendencies may be a consequence of self-punishment behaviors to perceived inadequacies and psychological issues.³

These issues create academic stress, which became a cause of inadequate sleep and due to which they starting use of stimulants, that entailing student's physical and mental health and which causes to exhibit more neurotic traits i.e., cognitive distortions, in these students which leads toward irrational thinking's and

believes that causes a strong self-harm behaviors and latterly these behavior's leads to committed suicide⁴

As these students had characteristic of being compassionate with their work and truthfulness to commitments. There, these characteristics make their academic expectations higher that is related to perfectionism which is a cognitive perspective of personal construct which explains that perfectionism is positively correlated with the irrational thinking's and believes.⁵ Through these believes medical students' show's both type of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionistic tendencies but they set their standards high by using the maladaptive type of perfectionism.

Perfectionism act as a mediator between medical student's personalities and their mental distresses⁶ i.e., self-harm, depression and anxiety issues. one of them is self-harm. Which is a form of a trait impulsivity that became the cause of their motivation of self-harm behaviors that statistically underlies 40-60% in

suicides.⁷ According to survey research in Pakistan⁸ women are more prone to self-harm than men. Along with they also identify the way of commit self-harm are lifting, use of poisons and play with fire. In individuals when they face feeling of emptiness at the time of stress and when they did not find someone from whom they can emotionally disclose, they commit self-harm to get rid relief from emotional pain in a functional way⁹, which is might a coping mechanism to get relief from extreme conditions or feelings including, tension, stress, depression, sense of failure and anxiety.¹⁰ Empirical studies shows that self-harm play a role of emotion regulation.¹¹ Respectively, perfectionism act as a buffer between self-harm and student's mental health. Relatively the buffer is high social support¹² from their parents/friends which leads toward high self-esteem.¹³ Furthermore, personality theories argued that adaptive form of perfectionism help these students to build positive self-esteem, a secure attachment which leads towards less academic burnout¹⁴ and then these students became able to performing well in academic achievements.¹⁵ Perceived social support act as a shelter in student lives.¹⁶ It had different types, emotional support which plays a key role in any individual life¹⁷, another is instrumental support. Social support had positive impact on students career it acts as intimidator¹⁸ and a protective barrier against stressful events. which help these students to reach their goals¹⁹ with the support of their parents/guardians. According to self-determination theory social support motivates persons desires to attain their achievements.²⁰ Which make them less vulnerable to psychological issues²¹ and self-harm. By getting social support they keep balance between their inner and outer competencies.²²

■ METHODOLOGY

The current study was conducted in the medical universities of Pakistan (Lahore). It is a cross sectional, questionnaire-based

study comprises of three research protocols. The sample (N = 250) which was decided on the basis of number of items on Performa was selected from government and private medical universities of Lahore. The multi-stage random sampling was used to recruit the participants. The sample was divided into two strata respectively, institutes (government and private) and then sub-divided according to the gender than participants select randomly from theses strata. Further. It included the population of students studying in MBBS (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th & 5th Year) and Nursing (1st, 2nd, 3rd, & 4th year) bachelors. While other than medical/nursing students are excluded from study. The age range of the participants were 18-25 years. Research protocol consist of 3 scales. First scale, Perfectionistic Tendencies Scale²³ was used to identify the perfectionistic tendencies in university students. This scale consists of three factors having 35 items. Second, the Self-harm Tendencies Scale²⁴ was used to identify the self-harm tendencies in early adults. The scale had 41 items, having two factors (F1=emotional relational problems, F2=Acting out tendencies). While the third scale Multidimensional Perceived Social Support²⁵ was used to identify the perceived social support and this scale comprised of 12 items and three factors (1; Significant Others and 2; Family and 3; Friends).

After taken permission from authors through e-mail for using scales for research purpose, data were collected from the both medical and nursing students. Then permission letter was given to the authorities of the selected universities institution review

board (IRB # 2019-05-071) for the approval of collecting data. So, after completing the IRB whole procedure universities allowed access to students. Students from different private and government medical universities of Pakistan (Lahore) were asked to fill the questionnaire. Students was selected randomly and explained them the purpose of the study. Also informed consent was taken from the participants. Firstly, demographic questionnaire was administered later on, a set of questionnaires were given to each participant to record their responses on approximate time. The ethics were kept in view while conducting the study.

The relationships of perfectionism, PSS and self-harm tendencies were explored through the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and Mediation Analysis was carried out on PROCESS by using Hayes Model. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Institute of Clinical Psychology, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan, with IRB No. 2019-05-071. Informed consent was acquired from all study participants with the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity.

■ RESULTS

Of the 250 subjects, 75 (30%) were boys and 175 (70%) were females. The overall mean age of participants (n=250) was 21.50 and (SD=1.38). Similarly, 145 (58%) were MBBS students and 105 (42%) were nursing students. The majority of the participants were from 2nd year 86(34%). Overall 1st and 2nd years of students were 110(44%)

Table 1: Inter Correlation, Mean, Standard Deviation on PTS and Other Scales

Variables	M	SD	PTS	PSS	SH
PTS	49.81	10.88	-	.129*	.171*
PSS	59.49	14.27	-	-	.095***
SH	89.23	31.44	-	-	-

Note SD=Standard Deviation, M=Mean, TPTS=Total Perfectionistic Tendencies Scales, TMPSS=Multidimensional Perceived Social Support Scale, TSHTS=Total Self-Harm Tendencies Scales, *p<0.05, ***p<0.001

Table 2: Regression Coefficients, Standard Error, and Model Summary Information for the Perfectionism, Perceived Social Support and Self-harm

Antecedent	Consequent								
	M (SS)				Y (SH)				
		β	SE	P		β	SE	p	
PS (X)	A	.12	.08	.04	c'	.19***	.05	.001***	
SS (M)		---	---	---	B	.15	.04	.013**	
R2 = .01				R2 = .06					
F (1,248) = 2.04, p= .001***				F (2,247) = 2.48, p =.001***					

Note. PS=perfectionism scale, SS= social support scale, SH= self-harm, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

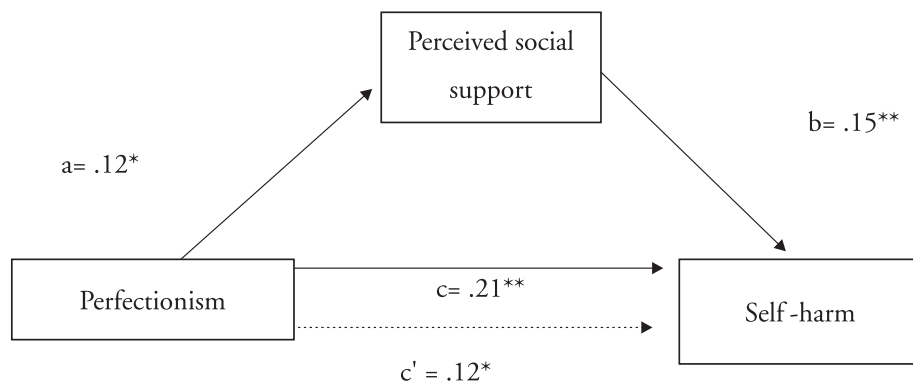


Figure 1. Mediation analysis of Social Support in the relationship between PS and SH.

and 3rd -5th year students were 140 (56%). Most of the participants were living in nuclear family system 197 (78%) and majority of the students were day scholars 134 (53%), while 116 (46%) lived in hostels.

There was a significant positive relationship of perfectionism and social support ($r=.129, p=.05$) and significant mild relationship with self-harm tendencies ($r=.171, p=.05$) Furthermore, it highlights that there were strong positive significant correlations of social support with self-harm ($r=.095, p=.001$).

Mediation analysis (figure 1) shows that perceived social support a significant mediator between perfectionism and self-harm.

The above table shows that there is a significant positive relationship of perfectionism with social support ($r=.129, p=.05$) and significant mild relationship with self-harm tendencies ($r=.171, p=.05$). Furthermore, it shows that there was strong positive signifi-

cant relationship of social support with self-harm ($r=.095, p=.001$).

The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation indicated a significant association of Perfectionism tendencies, perceived social support and self-harm in university students. Hence, the mediating role of perceived social support in the relationship between perfectionism and self-harm. Figure 1 shows that total effect of perfectionism on self-harm ($\beta = .21, SE = .08, p < .001$) was strongly significant. Furthermore, direct effects of perfectionism on perceived social support ($\beta = .12, SE = .04, p < .01$) and SS on SH ($\beta = .15, SE = .04, p < .01$) were also significant. Findings of the current research revealed that perceived social support is significantly partially mediates the relationship between perfectionistic tendencies and self-harm, as social support act as mediator, beta value is reduced but c' model ($\beta = .12, SE = .08, p < .01$) is still significant.

Table II shows that students who had

more perfectionistic tendencies tend to commit self-harm behaviors. Also, social support act role that students those who had good social support, shows less self-harm behaviors while those who did not get enough support which leads them toward commit self-harm behaviors.

DISCUSSION

This study was done to investigate the relationship between perfectionism, and self-harm in the presence of mediating variable perceived social support in MBBS and nursing students. The results of current study show that perfectionism had positive relationship with self-harm in MBBS and nursing students. These results are supported from the literature that maladaptive perfectionism bring discomfort and leads towards negative thinking in an individual life, while those who had negative thoughts start thinking negative about one self, from their family, friends and from surroundings peoples.²⁶ According to another research self-orientated perfectionism is a partly positive predictor of poor mental health which leads toward depressive symptoms and later on it cause insomnia and which is significant predictor of self-harm behaviors.²⁷ The reason behind this behavior seems to be the inconsistent as most of the students are lived in the hostels and they meet their families after long times, also they had busy days and nights due to which they did not focus on their health (mentally/physically). Along with they remain alone most of the time for their study purpose. All these might be the reason of leading them toward self-harm behaviors. Because they did not have much time to excrete their exhaustions. Furthermore, results show the significant positive association of perfectionism, social support and self-harm behaviors. It supports from the literature that social support is a key of success in a student life and it play a positive role in between perfectionism and psychological distress²⁸.

Another objective of this study was to understand mediation effect of perceived social support between perfectionism and self-harm, this study reveals that getting social support from peers, family and friends help them to survive happily and mentally peacefully. Social support plays a mediator role in student's life as social support directly effects on mental health. As findings of the study also supported from literature that social support acts a shelter in students' life, through which they became able to attain their goals.²⁹ Due to their varying perceived social support levels, our participants' reactions to perfectionism varied. Those with strong PSS scores were less likely to have self-harm tendencies. These findings supported by literature that PSS may have a protective effect in preventing perfectionists from developing mental health issues because perfectionists who believed they had low levels of social support were more likely to do so, whereas perfectionists who believed they had high levels of social support were less likely to experience these negative emotions.³⁰ So, the findings of this study suggest that PSS act as a shield against self-harm in perfectionists.

■ LIMITATIONS

As this study was conducted on students of Bachelors but it is recommended that this study should also be conducted with house officers, FCPS doctors and male nurses.

■ CONCLUSION

This study aimed to assess relation of perfectionism with perceived social support and self-harm in medical and nursing students. It can be concluded that being a perfectionistic they strive hard for their physical and mental health which leads them towards self-harming behaviors and commit suicide.

■ RECOMMENDATIONS

Research findings would help to create awareness among medical students who are vulnerable to self-harm behaviors. Further researches can be done in the medical/nursing students and professionals.

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Author's Contribution

SF and AS conceived the idea, collected the data and write up of the manuscript. SS and STZ contributed in data analysis and write up of the manuscript. Authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

Conflict of Interest

Authors declared no conflict of interest

Grant Support and Financial Disclosure

None

Data Sharing Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.