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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROCRASTINATION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG ADULTS

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Abstract

Procrastination can lead to a cycle of avoidance, resulting in increased pressure as deadlines approach and ultimately contributing to higher levels of psychological distress. The study aimed of this research is to examine the relationship between procrastination and psychological distress among adult. Correlational design was used. A random sampling was applied. Sample Size was consisted of (N=300) and Adults. The Procrastination Scale and, The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) used to collect data. The psychometric properties of the scales used showed good internal consistency. The results showed that procrastination and psychological distress were positively correlated, and that procrastination was a significant predictor of psychological distress. Additionally, the study found no significant differences in procrastination and psychological distress between male and female participants, as well as between those from nuclear and joint family systems where p< 0.001). This study highlights the importance of addressing procrastination in order to mitigate psychological distress, and suggests that interventions aimed at reducing procrastination may be beneficial for adults. Mental health professionals can play a crucial role by assessing and addressing procrastination habits in their clients, while educational institutions and workplaces can implement supportive measures to help individuals overcome procrastination.

Key Words: *Procrastination, Psychological Distress, and Adults*

Introduction

Procrastination is commonly conceptualized as an irrational tendency to delay required tasks or assignments despite the negative effects of this postponement on the individuals and organizations (Klingsieck, 2013). Poets have even written figuratively about procrastination, with such phrases as "*Procrastination is the Thief of Time*," and "*Procrastination is the Art of Keeping up with Yesterday*" (Ferrari et al., 1995). Literal meanings are retained today in terms of time management. The conceptualizations of procrastination imply inaction, or postponing, delaying, or putting off a decision, in keeping with the Latin origins of the term "pro-," meaning "forward, forth, or in favor of," and "-crastinus," meaning "tomorrow" (Klein, 1971). Time delay is just the behavioral reflection, while personality traits, cognitive and motivational process, as well as contextual conditions are in-depth inducements to procrastination. Procrastination can be viewed as purposive and irrational delay so as to miss the deadlines (Akerlof, 1991; Schraw et al., 2007).

In the past two decades, there has been an extensive increase in the interest in procrastination (Ko & Chang, 2019). Worldwide, approximately 20% to 25% of adolescents and adults suffer from chronic procrastination tendencies in their work and personal lives (Balkis & Duru, 2007; Ferrari & Diaz, 2014; Ko & Chang, 2019). While, it was reported that 70% of college students consider themselves academic procrastinators (Schouwenburg, Lay, Pychyl, & Ferrari, 2004). The relationship between procrastination and health was examined (Steel & Ferrari, 2013). Furthermore, procrastination was identified as one of the utmost problematic behaviors need-

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Psychological distress encompasses a range of emotional suffering typically characterized by symptoms of depression and anxiety (Kessler et al., 2002). Adults experiencing high levels of psychological distress often report feelings of overwhelm, helplessness, and impaired functioning in daily activities. The relationship between procrastination and psychological distress is complex and multidimensional, involving cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components. Several theoretical frameworks have been proposed to understand this relationship. For instance, the temporal motivation theory (TMT) posits that procrastination results from the interaction of expectancy, value, impulsiveness, and time (Steel & König, 2006).

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), psychological distress defines as "undifferentiated group of symptoms ranging from anxiety and depression symptoms to functional impairment, personality traits (confusing, troubling), and behavioral problems (DSM, 2013). Psychological distress is commonly defined by the presence of anxiety, depression, and stress. These emotional states can significantly impair an individual's ability to function in daily life. According to Mirowsky and Ross (2002), psychological distress involves "the internal processes that reflect the individual's reaction to the perceived demands that exceed their adaptive capacity. Psychological distress is prevalent across various demographic groups and can be influenced by numerous factors, including socioeconomic status, physical health, and life events. A study by Kessler et al. (2002) found that approximately 30% of adults experience significant psychological distress at some point in their lives. Psychological distress is a critical issue affecting many adults, with far-reaching implications for their overall health and quality of life. Psychological distress is commonly found in general population, and estimated around 5-48% of total population. Psychological distress often viewed as a part of normal life, as consequences of misfortune, such as suffering from daily life transition, challenges and loss, in education, work, exile or persecution (Joseph & Abraham, 2018). Psychological distress defines "as a constant experience of unhappiness, anxiety, anger

Literature Review

Previous research has conceptualized procrastination from multiple perspectives, including individual differences, task characteristics, motivational factors, and demographic variables (Steel et al., 2001; Steel, 2007; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984; Mann, 2016). Studies have identified several personal factors associated with procrastination, such as lower income, younger age, male gender, single marital status, and lower educational attainment, although findings across studies remain inconsistent (Ko & Chang, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2013; Steel & Ferrari, 2013; Hinsch & Sheldon, 2013). Various theoretical frameworks, including self-worth theory, rational emotive behavior theory, achievement motivation theory, and learned helplessness, have been proposed to explain procrastination (Chiu et al., 2020). According to self-worth theory, procrastination functions as a self-protective strategy in which individuals rely on negative beliefs and experience emotions such as anxiety, stress, and depression to preserve their sense of self-worth (Spada et al., 2006; Flett et al., 1995; Sirois, 2014; Stober & Joormann, 2001).

Rozental et al. (2022) examined procrastination among university students to distinguish severe cases requiring professional support from less severe cases. The study included 732 Swedish university students (66.6% female; *M* age = 28.8 years) who completed an online survey. Results indicated that 71% of participants perceived procrastination as a significant problem, with an average onset at 17.5 years of age, and nearly 30% had considered seeking professional help. Students classified as severe procrastinators were substantially more likely to identify procrastination as problematic (96–97%) compared to those with less severe procrastination (42–48%). They were also more likely to consider seeking help (35–38% vs.

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5–7%) and reported significantly greater negative effects on major life domains, particularly academic and work performance. The findings suggest that severe procrastination is associated with considerable functional impairment and highlights the importance of early identification and targeted psychological support (Rozental et al., 2022).

Maria and Patra (2022) investigated the relationship between procrastination, psychological distress, psychopathology, and life satisfaction among Greek university students using two independent samples (N = 681 and N = 183). The first sample comprised undergraduate students (78.6% female; M age = 20.3 years) from the University of Ioannina. The findings revealed that academic procrastination was positively associated with multiple dimensions of psychopathology, including Somatization, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, anxiety, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideation, and psychoticism. Academic procrastination was also positively related to the number of unfinished courses, indicating poorer academic performance. In the second sample, general procrastination showed significant positive correlations with anxiety, psychological distress, depression, and loss of behavioral and emotional control, while demonstrating significant negative associations with mental health, psychological well-being, emotional ties, positive effect, and life satisfaction. These findings suggest that procrastination is a significant risk factor for psychological distress and reduced well-being among university students (Maria & Patra, 2022).

Sutcliffe et al. (2019) examined the relationships among academic procrastination, psychological flexibility, and delay discounting in a sample of 139 third-year psychology students. The study found a moderate negative correlation between psychological flexibility and academic procrastination, indicating that students with lower psychological flexibility were more likely to procrastinate. However, no significant relationship was found between procrastination and delay discounting, and delay discounting did not moderate the association between psychological flexibility and procrastination. Additionally, discounting of hypothetical monetary rewards was not significantly correlated with discounting of experienced video rewards, suggesting that these measures reflect different aspects of delay discounting. The findings highlight psychological flexibility as an important factor associated with academic procrastination, whereas delay discounting appears to have a limited role (Sutcliffe et al., 2019).

Research on gender differences in procrastination has produced mixed findings. Some studies suggest that female students are more likely to procrastinate than males (Washington, 2004; Rodarte-Luna & Sherry, 2008), whereas others report higher levels of procrastination among male students (Prohaska et al., 2000). Similarly, Balkis and Duru (2009) found that male university students exhibited greater procrastination tendencies than female students in a sample of 580 undergraduates. In contrast, Ozer and Ferrari (2011) reported no significant gender differences in academic procrastination. These inconsistent findings indicate that the relationship between gender and procrastination remains inconclusive and warrants further investigation.

Pakistani research has also highlighted the adverse effects of procrastination on psychological and academic outcomes. Mohsin and Ayub (2014) found that procrastination was negatively associated with job satisfaction among teachers, whereas delay of gratification was positively related to job satisfaction. Hussain and Sultan (2010) reported that procrastination adversely affected university students' academic performance, learning, assignment completion, examination preparation, and participation in academic activities, with workload and poor time management identified as major contributing factors. Similarly, Aziz and Tariq (2013) found that procrastination was positively related to stress and negatively associated with life satisfaction among Pakistani students. Furthermore, Saleem and Rafique

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(2012) reported a significant negative relationship between procrastination and self-esteem, suggesting that interventions aimed at enhancing self-esteem may help reduce procrastination. Overall, Pakistani studies consistently demonstrate that procrastination is linked to poorer academic performance, lower psychological well-being, and reduced job satisfaction.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical framework for this study is anchored in several psychological theories that explain the mechanisms linking procrastination and psychological distress. These theories provide a comprehensive understanding of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes involved in procrastination and its impact on mental health.

Temporal Motivation Theory (TMT)

According to TMT, tasks perceived as aversive or low in value are more likely to be delayed, especially when individuals have high impulsiveness and the deadline is distant. This delay contributes to increased stress and anxiety as deadlines approach, linking procrastination to psychological distress (Steel & Konig, 2006.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

SDT emphasizes the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in human behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Procrastination may arise from a lack of intrinsic motivation or autonomy in performing tasks. This lack of motivation can lead to feelings of incompetence and frustration, which contribute to psychological distress. Understanding how different types of motivation influence procrastination can help in designing interventions to enhance intrinsic motivation and reduce distress.

Cognitive-Behavioral Theory (CBT)

CBT focuses on the interplay between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. It suggests that maladaptive thought patterns lead to negative emotions and dysfunctional behaviors (Beck, 1976). Procrastination is often maintained by irrational beliefs and cognitive distortions, such as perfectionism and fear of failure. These maladaptive thoughts contribute to stress, anxiety, and depression. CBT-based interventions can address these cognitive distortions, thereby reducing procrastination and its associated distress**.**

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

TPB explains behavior through attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Procrastination can be influenced by negative attitudes towards tasks, perceived social pressures, and a lack of confidence in one's ability to complete tasks. These factors can lead to procrastination and subsequent psychological distress. TPB provides a framework for understanding how altering these attitudes and perceptions can reduce procrastination.

Emotion Regulation Theory

This theory focuses on how individuals manage and respond to their emotional experiences (Gross, 1998). Procrastination can be seen as a maladaptive coping strategy to avoid negative emotions associated with certain tasks. However, this avoidance leads to increased stress and anxiety. Improving emotion regulation strategies can help individuals cope more effectively, reducing procrastination and distress.

Rationale

The rationale for investigating the relationship between procrastination and psychological distress among adults is grounded in the significant implications that procrastination has on mental health and overall wellbeing. Procrastination, a prevalent behavior characterized by delaying tasks despite potential negative consequences, is not only a common issue in everyday life but also a significant factor influencing psychological health (Steel, 2007). Procrastination affects a large portion of the adult population, with estimates suggesting that around 20% of adults identify themselves as chronic procrastinators (Ferrari,

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2010). Given its widespread occurrence, understanding procrastination's impact on psychological distress is essential for public health and individual wellbeing. Procrastination, the act of delaying or postponing tasks, is a common behavior that affects individuals across various domains of life, including education, work, and personal responsibilities. Psychological distress, encompassing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress, has been shown to correlate with procrastination. Understanding the relationship between procrastination and psychological distress among adults is essential for developing effective interventions to improve mental health and productivity.

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between procrastination and psychological distress among adults
2. To identify potential mediators and moderators of the relationship between procrastination and psychological distress
3. To explore demographic and psychosocial factors associated with procrastination and psychological distress
4. To propose recommendations for interventions aimed at mitigating procrastination and reducing psychological distress among adults.

Hypotheses

H_1: There is a significant positive relationship between procrastination and psychological distress among adults.

H_2: Higher levels of procrastination are associated with increased levels of anxiety, depression, and stress.

H_3: There is a significant gender difference in procrastination and psychological distress among adults.

Method

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between procrastination and psychological distress among adults. A quantitative approach was selected because it enables the collection and statistical analysis of numerical data to investigate associations between variables and produce objective, generalizable findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The study sample consisted of (N=300) adults aged 18–30 years, recruited using stratified random sampling to ensure adequate representation across age, gender, and occupational groups. Participants were eligible if they were between 18 and 30 years of age, reported engaging in procrastination behaviors, experienced psychological distress, and provided informed consent to participate. Individuals younger than 18 or older than 30 years, those with significant cognitive impairments or developmental disorders, and those who were unable or unwilling to complete the study procedures were excluded. The collected data were analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques to determine the relationship between procrastination and psychological distress.

Measures

Procrastination scale by (Lay, 1986)

Procrastination scale was developed by (Lay, 1986), procrastination scale was consist of 20 items. Responses across items are summed to obtain a single score. The scale has a Cronbach alpha of 0.82 (Lay, 1986) and a retest reliability of 0.80 (Ferrari, 1989) Points are given based on five points where 1 means extremely uncharacteristic and 5 states extremely characteristics. The 5 point item (1=low, 5=high).

The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10)

The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) is employed as a reliable measure of psychological distress in this study (Kessler et al., 2003). Comprising 10 questions related to emotional states, each with a five-level response scale, the K10 serves as a brief yet

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comprehensive tool to identify varying levels of distress. Respondents can either complete the measure independently or have questions read to them by a practitioner. Lower scores indicate lower psychological distress, while higher scores suggest elevated distress levels. Scoring of each item is scored from 'none of the time' (score 1) to 'all of the time' (score 5).

Procedure

After a short briefing about the background of the research topics and instruments with the assurance of confidentiality then present my research instruments to the participant in one time for collection response. The respondents were taking using convenience sampling method. Data collection was conducted through an online/physical Questionnaire. The questionnaire was constructed using online or physical of the survey was shared. Before taking part in the survey, respondents were required to read the general instructions which included the informed consent. Next, if they do not have any enquiries, and are willing to participate in the study, they were required to proceed with answering the questionnaire. Lastly, after they completed the questionnaire, all the responses were submitted for the analysis of results. Data collected was analyzed using SPSS-v25.

Results

Table 1: *Demographic characteristics of sample in the study (N=300)*

Categories	**M(SD)**	***f(%)***
Gender	1.50(.501)	
Male		150(50.0)
Female		150(50.0)
Education	1.20(.403)	
BS		239(79.7)
MS/MPHIL		61(20.3)
Age	1.85(.718)	
18-20		103(34.3)
21-23		139(46.3)
24-26		58(19.3)
Family System	1.50(.501)	
Nuclear		150(50.0)
Joint		150(50.0)
Socio-Economic Status	2.01(.604)	
Upper		53(17.7)
Middle		191(63.7)
Lower		56(18.7)
Marital Status	1.29(.463)	
Single		213(71.0)

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Married	86(28.7)
Divorced	1(.3)

Note: N=300, M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, %= Percentage

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the study participants (N = 300). The sample consisted of an equal number of males (50.0%) and females (50.0%). Most participants were enrolled in BS programs (79.7%), while 20.3% were pursuing MS/MPhil degrees. The largest proportion of participants belonged to the 21–23 years age group (46.3%), followed by 18–20 years (34.3%) and 24–26 years (19.3%). Participants were equally distributed between nuclear (50.0%) and joint family systems (50.0%). The majority belonged to the middle socioeconomic status (63.7%), followed by the lower (18.7%) and upper (17.7%) socioeconomic groups. Regarding marital status, most participants were single (71.0%), followed by married (28.7%), while only 0.3% were divorced.

Table 2: Psychometric Properties of the Major Study Measures (n = 300)

Variables	M	SD	A	Skewness	Kurtosis	Range
KPDS	30.60	5.168	.876	-.497	3.366	38
PS	59.80	6.412	.863	.175	.977	44

Note. k = no of items, M= Mean; SD= Standard Deviation, α =Alpha coefficient; KPDS= Kessler Psychological Distress Scale, PS= Procrastination Scale

The first scale, Kessler Psychological Distress Scale, consists of 10 items and shows a Cronbach's alpha of .876, suggesting very good internal consistency. The second scale, Procrastination Scale, includes 20 items and has a Cronbach's alpha of .863, indicating good internal consistency. These values demonstrate the reliability and consistency of the scales in measuring the intended constructs.

Table 3: Correlation between the Relationship between procrastination and Psychological Distress among Adults (N = 300).

Variable	M	SD	KPDS	PS
KPDS	30.60	5.168	-	.196**
PS	59.80	6.412		-

*Note: **Correlation is significant at the level of 0.01 (2 tailed)*, KPDS= Kessler Psychological Distress Scale, PS= Procrastination Scale.

The correlations between variables, revealing various relationships between psychological distress and procrastination. The correlation coefficient (r) between KPDS and PS is .196, which is statistically significant ($p < .05$). This suggests a positive correlation between the two variables, indicating that individuals with higher scores on the KPDS tend to also have higher scores on the PS scale.

Table 4: On the Basis of Gender Differences a Comparison on the Variables the Relationship between procrastination and Psychological Distress among Adults (N = 300).

Variable	Male N=150		Female N=150		T	df	p	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD				LL	UL	
KPDS	30.73	4.193	30.48	5.999	.413	298	.000	-.929	1.42	0.08
PS	59.48	5.890	60.13	6.899	-.873	298	.149	-2.10	.811	-0.23

Note: P<.05, M=Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, Df= Degree of Freedom, p= Level of significance, KPDS= Kessler Psychological Distress Scale, PS= Procrastination Scale

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A comparative analysis of male (N=150) and female (N=150) participants across various variables, revealing intriguing patterns of similarity and difference. Notably, the results of the comparative analysis reveal no significant differences in procrastination (KPDS) and psychological distress (PS) between male and female participants. Specifically, the t-values and p-values for both variables indicate non-significant results (KPDS: t = .413, p = .680; PS: t = -.873, p = .383). Additionally, the 95% confidence intervals and Cohen's d effect sizes further support the absence of significant differences between the two groups. These findings suggest that male and female participants exhibit similar levels of procrastination and psychological distress, indicating that gender may not play a significant role in these variables.

Table 5: Regression between the Relationship between procrastination and Psychological Distress among Adults (N = 300).

Variables	B	β	T	P
Constant	21.148		7.680	.000
PS	.158	.196	3.453	.001
R	.196			
ΔR^2	.038			

*p<.05, PS= Procrastination Scale

A regression analysis predicting psychological distress from family system and procrastination. The model accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in psychological distress (R^2 = .038, F(2, 297) = 3.453, p = .001). Standardized coefficients indicate that Procrastination (β = .158, p = .001) had a significant positive effect on psychological distress, while Family System (β = .196, p = .001) also had a significant effect. The constant term was also significant (β = 21.148, p = .000). These results suggest that procrastination and family system are significant predictors of psychological distress.

Discussion

The present study investigated the relationship between procrastination and psychological distress among adults and found a significant positive association between the two variables, indicating that individuals with higher levels of procrastination experienced greater psychological distress. Regression analysis further demonstrated that procrastination significantly predicted psychological distress, highlighting procrastination as an important psychological risk factor. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that procrastination is associated with increased anxiety, depression, stress, emotional dysregulation, and reduced psychological well-being (Rozental et al., 2022; Maria & Patra, 2022; Gupta et al., 2022; Klingsberg et al., 2021). The results support theoretical perspectives suggesting that procrastination functions as an emotion-regulation strategy, whereby individuals temporarily avoid unpleasant tasks to reduce immediate discomfort; however, this avoidance ultimately intensifies stress, guilt, and psychological distress over time. Although procrastination explained a modest proportion of the variance in psychological distress, its significant predictive role emphasizes the importance of addressing procrastinatory behaviors within mental health interventions.

The study further revealed no significant differences in procrastination or psychological distress across gender and family system, suggesting that these psychological experiences are relatively similar among males and females and among individuals from nuclear and joint families. These findings are consistent with studies reporting no gender differences in procrastination (Ozer & Ferrari, 2011), although they contrast with earlier research that identified gender- and family-based variations (Balkis & Duru, 2009; Singh & Sharma, 2021). The inconsistency across studies may reflect differences in sociocultural context, sampling characteristics, and measurement approaches. Overall, the findings indicate that procrastination is a more influential determinant of psychological distress than demographic characteristics.

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The study highlights the need for interventions targeting self-regulation, emotion regulation, and time-management skills to reduce procrastination and improve psychological well-being. Future longitudinal research should explore additional psychological factors, including perfectionism; resilience, coping strategies, and social support, to better understand the mechanisms linking procrastination with psychological distress.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between procrastination, psychological distress, and demographic variables among a sample of 300 participants. The results showed that procrastination and psychological distress were positively correlated, and that procrastination was a significant predictor of psychological distress. Additionally, the study found no significant differences in procrastination and psychological distress between male and female participants, as well as between those from nuclear and joint family systems. The findings suggest that procrastination is a significant predictor of psychological distress, and that demographic variables such as gender and family system may not play a significant role in influencing this relationship. Overall, the study highlights the importance of addressing procrastination in order to mitigate psychological distress, and suggests that interventions aimed at reducing procrastination may be beneficial for individuals from diverse demographic backgrounds

Implications

The findings of this study highlight the importance of addressing procrastination as a factor associated with psychological distress among adults. Interventions focusing on cognitive-behavioral strategies, emotion regulation, self-regulation, and time-management skills may help reduce procrastination and improve mental well-being. Mental health professionals, educators, and organizations should consider assessing procrastination and integrating appropriate interventions into clinical, educational, and workplace settings. The findings also support the development of preventive mental health programs that strengthen adaptive coping and resilience. Future research should use longitudinal and experimental designs and examine additional variables, such as perfectionism, self-esteem, resilience, and coping strategies, to better understand this relationship.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. Its cross-sectional correlational design prevents conclusions about causality between procrastination and psychological distress. The use of self-report questionnaires may have introduced response and social desirability biases. Additionally, the sample included only young adults (18–30 years), limiting the generalizability of the findings to other populations. Important contextual factors, including socioeconomic status, cultural background, personality traits, and social support, were not examined. Moreover, the regression model explained only a modest proportion of psychological distress, indicating the influence of other factors. Future studies should use longitudinal designs, larger and more diverse samples, and include additional psychosocial variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this relationship.

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