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The relationship of perfectionism and well-being in young Indians: A qualitative study

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Abstract

Perfectionism is a quality of mind that has an impulse for high-performance standards and tags along with a propensity to captiously criticize oneself. It is strongly correlated with one's mental health and has a significant strong impact on one's career, studies, and overall quality of life. This paper explores different aspects of perfectionism and its relationship with well-being. A study of young age groups has been conducted by Interviewing 25 people in the Delhi-NCR region in India. Results show that the majority of people (84%) do not adhere to the ideal of perfectionism, whereas 16% of participants do believe in the idea of perfectionism. However, 44% of them identified as perfectionists. About 56% of people criticize themselves when they don't feel good enough, whereas 44% believe they are good enough regardless of how they feel. Yet almost 24% of respondents say that striving for perfection is beneficial to their well-being, whereas 76% disagree with this. The results of this study would be useful for expanding the knowledge on different aspects of perfectionism and the perception of youth about how perfectionism affects their well-being.

Keywords: Perfectionism, perfectionists, Well-being

1. Introduction

It's often said that we need to be perfect in all areas of our lives, including our jobs, relationships, routines, and even our physical appearance. Many endeavors for perfection and there is currently more discussion on this long-standing idea that has come to light. Perfectionism, in psychology, is a broad personality style characterized by a person's concern with striving for flawlessness and perfection and is accompanied by critical self-evaluations and concerns regarding others' evaluations (Stoeber and Childs, 2010) ^[1]. It's a personality trait that is very important in understanding human behavior and functioning (Kamushadze *et al.*, 2021) ^[6]. Well-being is the experience of health, happiness, and prosperity (Davis, 2019) ^[2]. It includes being in good mental health, enjoying life to the fullest, feeling as though one has a purpose or meaning, and being able to cope with stress. Numerous research examining the connections between various aspects of perfectionism and well-being revealed common themes. This study examines different aspects of perfectionism in young Indians' perception through qualitative analysis and interpretation.

2. Research Review

Research shows that perfectionist tendencies are favorably as well as unfavorably correlated with well-being. Kamushadze *et al.* (2021) ^[6] quantitatively examined the associations between different aspects of perfectionism and psychological well-being in 156 participants and found strong associations between psychological well-being and conscientious perfectionism. More than 40,000 college students who took a psychological test of perfectionism between 1989 and 2016 provided data (Curran and Hill, 2017) ^[1]. By the end of the study, the percentage had quadrupled to roughly 18% from the about nine percent of respondents who had high scores in the socially imposed perfectionism scale in 1989. Their analyses are based on 164 samples and 41,641 American, Canadian, and British college students, who completed the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale between 1989 and 2016 (Flett and Hewitt, 2022) ^[4]. The results show that young people in more recent generations believe people are more demanding of them, more demanding of others, and more demanding of themselves.

A study by Swider, Harari, and Breidenthal (2018) [13] revealed the pros and cons of perfectionism. Their study shows how complicated the psychology of perfectionism is. Perfectionists aim to create flawless work, and they also exhibit higher levels of drive and diligence than non-perfectionists. They are more likely to hold themselves to rigid and unreasonable high standards, to overly critique their behavior, to have an all-or-nothing attitude towards their performance, and to think that their self-worth depends on performing flawlessly. At the same time, they also exhibit higher levels of stress, fatigue, and anxiety, according to studies.

Grounded in the tripartite model of perfectionism and previous empirical support, the study by Suh, Gnilka, and Rice (2017) [12] explored different types of perfectionists and their well-being. 276 college students provided feedback on tests of neuroticism, perfectionism, conscientiousness, and well-being. Three unique latent categories of perfectionists - adaptive, maladaptive, and non-perfectionists - were discovered through latent profile analysis. The highest levels of meaning presence, subjective happiness, and life satisfaction were demonstrated by adaptive perfectionists, while the highest levels of the meaning search were demonstrated by maladaptive perfectionists. The importance of examining the diversity of perfectionists and their well-being is highlighted by the findings.

Yahghoubi and Mohammadzadeh (2015) [14] conducted a study on a comparison of perfectionism and related positive-negative dimensions in people with high traits of obsessive-compulsive and eating disorders characteristics. Using the stratified random sample method, 640 university students were selected. The data demonstrated that higher levels of obsessive-compulsive traits than eating disorder characteristics are more likely to be associated with perfectionism and related negative dimensions.

Slaney, Pincus, Uliaszek, and Wang (2006) [10] related the conceptions of perfectionism about interpersonal problems in a quantitative study of two hundred and seventy-nine undergraduate students and found significant hostile dominant and friendly submissive interpersonal problems in maladaptive perfectionists whereas the adaptive perfectionist exhibits the interpersonal adjustments.

While research on the connection between perfectionism and well-being among young people has received more attention recently, there is still a study shortage that explicitly examines this topic in the Indian community. According to anecdotal evidence, perfectionism is a very common trait among young people in India, and expectations and demands from parents, friends, instructors, and societal pressures are all thought to contribute to this tendency. To understand how perfectionism may appear and interact with mental health difficulties in young Indians, however, relatively few empirical studies have been undertaken.

The study that has been done in this area has mostly been devoted to examining the causes of perfectionism in Indian culture rather than examining its potential functions and consequences on well-being. The paucity of research in this area emphasizes the urgent need for additional empirical studies that investigate the effects of perfectionism on young Indians' mental health as well as potential solutions to these issues.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research objectives

The primary objective of this research is to explore the perception of youth about perfectionism. The specific objective of the research include:

- To study different aspects of perfectionism
- To find the effects of perfectionism on young Indians
- To study the relationship between perfectionism and well-being

3.2 Research Design

In scientific research, results and outcomes can be more accurate and valid, by using the right methodology for collecting and analyzing data. The research methodology has two main approaches, i.e. qualitative and quantitative (Kumar, 2011; Sidharth, 2023) [7, 9]. This study's perfectionism and well-being findings were collected using a qualitative research methodology. Compared to quantitative analysis, the qualitative approach provides a more comprehensive perspective on the research and provides more details about the process. Additionally, a qualitative approach is particularly successful since the researchers can present findings based on actual information if they gather data via interviews conducted. However, qualitative research has several limitations, such as difficulty in choosing a fairly random sample due to the complexity of the subjects being examined. The present research is a qualitative method study examining different aspects of perfectionism complemented by a survey. In this paper, an effort has been made to analyze the impact of perfectionism on human well-being.

3.3 Sample

Twenty-five young people from the Delhi-NCR region have been randomly chosen for the study. Participants' age ranged from 18 to 22 years with an average age of 19.4 years (SD = 1.25). 64% of participants are female and 36% are male. 80% of the participants are non-graduates, 12% had a graduation degree, and 8% had advanced degrees. 76% of the participants have graduate parents, and forty-four percent have been from business families. 56% of the participants are from working-class families.

3.4 Materials and Method

The participants have been explained with the fundamental inquiries followed by a general perspective on perfectionism, its related terms, and well-being followed by the research questions. The interview consisted of questions such as "According to you, what is perfectionism", "Are you a perfectionist?", "Do you think perfectionism affects well-being?", "If yes, how does it affect your well-being?", "Do you believe that perfectionism brings behavioral changes?" Participants were requested to express their opinion about the questions freely and openly. Detailed notes have been taken during the whole process with the consent of the respondents. The answers have been analyzed using the content and thematic analysis techniques generally followed in qualitative studies.

4. Results

Seven different questions had been asked in the detailed interview on different aspects of perfectionism and well-being. A summary of the results is produced in table one.

Table 1: Themes of Responses of the participants on Perfectionism and Wellbeing

No.	Question	Responses: Major Themes (with % of responses)
1.	According to you, what is perfectionism?	Being perfect in every segment of life. (44%)
		Best version of oneself (28%)
		Performing any act in a well-prescribed behavior (20%)
		Accepting the way you are (8%)
2.	Is Perfectionism achievable?	Yes (84%)
		No (16%)
3.	Are you a perfectionist?	Yes (36%)
		No (64%)
		Sometimes (4%)
4.	What are your reasons for being a perfectionist?	Developed over time (66.66%)
		Genetic (22.22%)
		Internal instinct (11.11%)
5.	What is "well-being" in your words?	It is a state of being happy (48%)
		It means that we are physically and mentally fit (52%)
6.	Do you criticize yourself when you don't feel good enough?	Yes (44%)
		No (56%)
7.	Do you think perfectionism affects human well-being?	Yes, it does have a significant impact on one's well-being (64%)
		No (28%)
		Sometimes (8%)
8.	If yes, how does it affect your well-being?	Positive effects include being motivated, satisfaction, and a sense of achievement (56%)
		Negative effects include self-doubt, anxiety, and disappointment. (48%)
		It leads to overburdening and vulnerability (16%)

Source: Authors' compilation

72% of the respondents perceive perfectionism to be the best version of oneself or being perfect in every segment of life. 84% perceive perfectionism as achievable whereas only 16% think it is difficult to attain. The majority (64%) don't consider themselves to be perfectionists. Most of the respondents perceive that perfectionism can be developed over some time whereas 30% think it to be genetic. The respondent believes that well-being is the state of being happy where they are physically and mentally fit. 44% of respondents believe that they are good enough regardless of how they feel in contrast to approximately 56% of people who criticize themselves for not being good enough. The majority of the youth think that perfectionism affects one's well-being with both positive and negative effects. Being motivated, satisfied, and enjoying the sense of achievement are positive whereas self-doubt, anxiety, disappointment, overburdening, and vulnerability have been reported as a negative effect by 64% of participants. There is no gender-wise discernible difference in these perceptions. However, age emerged to be a crucial attribute. When feeling inadequate, individuals between the ages of 21 and 22 don't criticize themselves as harshly as participants who are younger than them.

5. Discussion

The result of this study unearthed certain perceptions of youth about perfectionism which are discussed further. Youth think that perfectionism is being perfect or best in every segment of life. Each person holds subjectivity. It is infeasible to expect all the elements to line up in such a manner to result in a state of being perfect which is visible in the results too. The majority think that perfectionism is achievable but they don't beat themselves up when it's not achieved by them. The common perception is to view it as a trait that is genetic, intuitive, or can be developed over a period of time and can have a significant effect on the well-being of a person. Perfectionism does produce a sense of

accomplishment and satisfaction, but it is not the end of the story. It can lead to a negative attitude also about life. It may result in anxiety, self-harm, and sadness, in addition to overburdening the individual. It can ultimately cause one to give up on striving to be successful, to compromise lifestyle quality, and can have an impact on social interactions, career, or education.

Further, if anything less than perfect is seen as a failure, it may lead to even trying for fear of exposing our vulnerabilities. Yet the stress and pressure we put on ourselves in our daily lives, from our picture-perfect Instagram snap to our grades, employment status, qualifications, makeup, family appearance, and clothing is making us unwell, physically and mentally (DuBois, 2018) [3]. In this respect, the results of this study conform to other studies Worst of all are the unrealistic beauty standards, the idea of a perfect body. They refer to the standards that have been created for both men and women defining every aspect of their appearance, from body shape to height and weight (PlanetSpark, 2023) [8]. In today's world, beauty standards impact daily interactions, the commercial world, and the media. A survey found that 83% of women and 74% of men are dissatisfied with their physical appearance at one time or another. They get mad at life or others because they can't meet the fantasy expectations they've set for themselves through films or influencers (Garner, 2017) [5]. Perfectionists created these standards from a place of self-rejection. People are convinced that what they do is not enough. The efforts are not enough, the best is not enough which will ultimately going to affect their well-being. By concentrating on learning from an experienced and emphasizing the lure, an individual could recalibrate the responses to stressful conditions. One can engage with these as moments of opportunity instead of defeats and improve well-being instead of harming it. Focusing on the process, accepting the feelings, appreciating ourselves, enjoying the experience itself, embracing mistakes as learning opportunities, and

practicing self-acceptance might be some suggestions by which the youth can focus on building a healthy body and mind, and the ideals they take on board rather than chasing a perfect image of themselves.

6. Conclusion

This study is undertaken to understand different aspects of perfectionism in Indian youth at the age when young people are undergoing the challenging situations of physical, psychological, and career building. The analysis shows that the Indian youth understands what perfectionism is and how it affects their well-being. At the same time, they also agree that perfectionism is achievable. In this scenario, perfectionism might be an added stress that can flare up the down effects of other stressful situations for them. The study is a qualitative one and needs to be supported with quantitative testing. Due to the limited no. of participants in the interview, the nature, and the method of the study, there might be a researcher bias too. The results need to be authenticated by a more elaborate and quantitative analysis that might be undertaken in future research on the topic. The impact of demographic variables such as age, gender, education, income, disposition, and psychological characteristics could also be studied in detail in addition to the impacts of perfectionism.

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