

Relationship between Perfectionism and Burnout in Indian Employees

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1. Introduction

“Perfectionism is a personality attribute characterized by the intensity with which an individual strives to attain exceedingly unrealistic standards in terms of both performance and behavior” (Di Schiena, Luminet, Philippot, & Douilliez, 2012).

“Perfectionism is classified into three types - Socially Prescribed Perfectionism, Other-Oriented Perfectionism and Self-Oriented Perfectionism.”

This study was conducted to understand if any correlation is present between perfectionism and an emotional, physical, and mental state of exhaustion suffered by human beings called ‘Burnout’.

“Burnout can be defined as the reaction to the lengthened or chronic job stress” (Matin, Kalali & Anvari, 2012). “It draws a lot of mental and emotional resources and imposes psychological burden on employees.” Maslach and Jackson (1981) refer to burnout as “a syndrome of physical and mental dimensions involving physical exhaustion, long-term fatigue, and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.” It has been considered as hazardous for professional success since many years (Spinelli, 2016).

“Burnout” can be categorized into “personal burnout, work related burnout and client burnout (Kristensen et al., 2005).” According to the “Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (2005)”, “Personal burnout is the degree of physical and psychological fatigue and exhaustion experienced by the person”. “Work-related burnout can be defined as the degree of physical and psychological fatigue and exhaustion that is perceived by the person as related to his/her work”. “Client-related burnout is the prolonged stress faced by an individual while dealing with clients at work.”

The primary objective of this study is to understand whether the “perfectionism” in an individual leads to “burnout” or if there is a significant relationship between the two.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Perfectionism

"Perfectionism" is termed as the need of an individual to be, appear to be, or think that it is possible to be perfect in the work they do. Perfectionism is not completely a positive trait i.e., "Healthy perfectionism", it has its negative aspects as well. Researchers have begun to bifurcate perfectionism into two widely held categories, one "a maladaptive form which causes severe emotional stress," and "a second adaptive form that results in higher expectation and motivation to obtain expected standards of performance". Beiling, Israeli & Antony (2004) additionally report that "Maladaptive Evaluative Concerns was more strongly associated with depression, anxiety, and stress".

Hamachek (1978) indicated that the two forms of perfectionism are, a "positive form" identified as "normal perfectionism" and a "negative form" considered as "neurotic perfectionism." Stoeber, & Otto, (2006) assessed the evidence indicating that "(a) perfectionistic strivings are associated with positive characteristics and (b) healthy perfectionists show higher levels of positive characteristics compared to unhealthy perfectionists."

As per two-dimensional approach of perfectionism, "it has two forms, perfectionistic strivings, and perfectionistic concerns. Perfectionistic strivings are associated with positive characteristics and Perfectionistic concerns are associated with negative characteristics (Stoeber, 2006)."

"Two models of perfectionism have been considered to have influenced the literature in the past two decades: Hewitt and Flett's (1991) and Frost model (1990). The Hewitt and Flett model recognized that perfectionism has personal and social aspects and thus differentiates perfectionism in three different forms: self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism."

"Self-oriented perfectionism" entails creating unreasonable expectations, demanding high self-standards, and rigorously analyzing and chastising one's conduct. This factor involves a deep desire to reach excellence and escape disappointment. "Other-oriented perfectionism" entails imposing arbitrary expectations for significant ones, putting a premium on others' perfection, and judging others' results harshly. "Socially recommended compulsiveness": People who have an undeniable degree of socially endorsed hairsplitting will in general follow others' subjective assumptions. They feel that people are judging them harshly and that they are under strain to be perfect (Fairlie & Flett, 2003; Beheshtifar et al., 2011)

2.2 Burnout

Burnout is described by Maslach and Jackson (1981) as "a physical and mental condition characterized by physical exhaustion, long-term frustration, and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness." For several years, it has been viewed as a challenge to performance in the professional space. (Spinelli, 2016).

Over the years, interest in burnout has increased significantly considering its negative impact in the corporate world. (Argentero et al., 2008). Maslach (1981) described burnout as "syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishments that can occur among individuals who do people work".

In this study “Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI)” has been used, which consist of three measuring scales: “personal burnout, work related burnout and client related burnout (Kristensen, Borritz, Villadsen& Christensen 2005)”

2.3 Perfectionism and Burnout

A study carried out to understand the relationship between “multidimensional perfectionism” and “burnout” reports that “perfectionistic striving individuals had small negative if not non-significant relationship or association with overall burnout or the symptoms of burnout.” In contrast, “perfectionistic concerns demonstrated medium-to large and medium positive relationships with overall burnout and symptoms of burnout.” Therefore, “in some cases perfectionistic strivings were less adaptive and perfectionistic concerns were more maladaptive in the work environment (Hill & Curran, 2016).”

Comparative ideas arose in an investigation proposing that “perfectionistic concerns are a danger factor for junior competitors adding to the advancement of competitor burnout though perfectionistic strivings appear to be a protective factor (Madigan, Stoeber & Passfield, 2014).” Hill et al., (2018) observed that “socially prescribed perfectionism” displayed a “positive relationship with physical and mental exhaustion along with reduced performance and accomplishments.” On the other hand, “self-oriented perfectionism was found to have an inverse relationship with the three dimensions of burnout.” The finding supports the literature which states that “maladaptive perfectionism, a personality positioning, renders individuals vulnerable to the development of burnout (Gould et al., 1996; Lemyre et al., 2007)”. A similar study reports that “self-oriented perfectionism had a negative direct effect on emotional exhaustion, whereas socially prescribed perfectionism showed a positive direct effect on both emotional exhaustion and professional inefficacy” (Falco et al., 2014).

These investigations have tried to discover the correlation between “Burnout” and “Perfectionism” and the byproducts of the circumstances. The measurement of the degree is different for each experiment performed. Very few studies have been done to find the relationship between the three separate types of burnout – “Personal, workout and client”, on three types of perfectionism – “self- oriented, other oriented, socially prescribed perfectionism.” This study is an endeavour to understand the individual impact of each type of “perfectionism” on the three forms of “burnout.”

3. Objective

- The primary objective of this study is to ascertain relationship between nature and strength of relationship of “perfectionism” and “burnout”

4. Instruments

4.1 Perfectionism

The short version of the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS; Hewitt & Flett, 1991; short version: Hewitt, Habke, Lee-Baggley, Sherry, and Flett, 2008; Stoeber, Davis, & Townley, 2013) was used to assess the three dimensions: “self-oriented, other-oriented, and socially prescribed perfectionism.” “The MPS is a widely used measure of perfectionism and

it has demonstrated high reliability and validity in many studies across various samples”. (Hewitt &Flett, 2004)

4.2 Burnout

“Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI)” scale has been used to ascertain the level of “burnout” on three identified parameters: “personal burnout, work related burnout and client related burnout”.

5. Hypothesis

H01: There is no significant relationship between “self- oriented perfectionism” and “burnout”

H02: There is no significant association between “other- oriented perfectionism” and “burnout”

H03: There is no significant relationship between “socially prescribed perfectionism” and “burnout”

6. Sample

Total number of respondents was 173. Sample consists of 50% males and 49% females. Most of the respondents were of the age group 21-30 (95%), followed by 31-40 (2%), 41-50 (,2%), 51-60(1%) and 18-20 (1%). Most respondents had a work experience of 0-2 years (65%), followed by 3-5 years (22%), 6-12 years (11%), 12 - 20 years (1%) and 21 and above (1%). Most of the respondents were from the metro city (56%) followed by urban (41%), rural (3%). Convenience Sampling techniques used for the study.

7. Results and Discussion

Table I Correlation matrix of “Perfectionism” and “Burnout”

	<i>Self-oriented Perfectionism</i>	<i>Other-Oriented Perfectionism</i>	<i>Socially Prescribed Perfectionism</i>	<i>Personal Burnout</i>	<i>Work Burnout</i>	<i>Client Burnout</i>
Self-oriented Perfectionism	1					
Other- Oriented Perfectionism	0.57	1				
Socially Prescribed Perfectionism	0.39	0.56	1			
Personal Burnout	-0.11**	0.02*	0.03*	1		
Work Burnout	0.02*	0.08*	0.11*	0.57	1	
Client Burnout	0.00*	0.19**	0.18*	0.38	0.59	1

****p<0.05, *p>0.05**

Table I represents the correlation between three types of perfectionism “(self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism and socially prescribed perfection)” and three types of Burnout “(personal burnout, work burnout and client burnout)”.

“Self- oriented perfectionism” showed a weak negative correlation with personal “burnout” (-0.11), the relationship is statistically significant ($P < 0.05$), Hence alternate Hypothesis H_{11} is accepted. Negative correlation shows that the more an individual is a “self- oriented perfectionist”, the less he will face “personal burnout”. It showed a weak positive correlation with “work burnout”(0.02), which means the more an individual is a “self- oriented perfectionist” the more likely he is to face “work burnout”, the relationship is however not significant ($P > 0.05$) and there is zero correlation with client burnout ($P > 0.05$). and burnout with weak negative correlation is in line with a study (Hill, Andrew & Hall, Howard & Appleton, Paul (2009)) conducted to understand burnout and perfectionism link in athletes. It witnessed that “self-oriented perfectionism” was related to “burnout” of very low level.

“Other- oriented Perfectionism” showed a very weak positive correlation with “personal burnout” (0.02), the relationship is not significant ($P > 0.05$). It again showed a very weak positive correlation with “work burnout” (0.08, $P > 0.05$) and “client burnout” (0.19, $P < 0.05$). Therefore, more an individual is other oriented, more likely he will face all the three types of burnout. Moreover, there is a statistically significant relationship between “other-oriented perfectionism” and “client burnout” since the calculated P value is less than 0.05 ($P < 0.05$). Hence alternate Hypothesis H_{21} is accepted

According to a study by Childs, J. H., & Stoeber, J. (2010), “other oriented perfectionism” showed a significant negative correlation with “burnout”, which is not in consensus with our study because our study showed positive correlation between “other-oriented perfectionism” and all the three facets of “burnout”, however only “client burnout” showed significant positive correlation with “other-oriented perfectionism” (0.19 $p < 0.05$).

In this research, “other oriented perfectionism” showed a positive correlation with “client burnout”. While working with a client, one needs to be in sync with the third party (client) while working on the artifacts that need to be delivered. The deliverables need to fulfil the requirements coming from the client. If an individual has other oriented perfectionism, he will set high standards from the client, and if the client fails to meet the standards, it creates a gap in understanding between the two parties, resulting into mental exhaustion for the individual while working with the client. Hence, a significant positive correlation is observed between the two.

“Socially Prescribed Perfectionism” showed a very weak positive correlation with “personal burnout” (0.03). which means the more an individual is a “Socially Prescribed perfectionist” the more likely he is to face “personal burnout”. However, the relationship is not significant ($P > 0.05$). It showed a weak positive correlation with “work burnout” (0.11), which means the more an individual is a “Socially Prescribed perfectionist” the more likely he is to face “work burnout”, but the correlation is statistically not significant ($P > 0.05$) and weak positive correlation with “client burnout” (0.18), is again statistically not significant ($P > 0.05$). Therefore, null hypothesis H_{03} is accepted.

According to a study by Childs, J. H., & Stoeber, J. (2010), “socially prescribed perfectionism” showed significant positive correlation with “burnout”, which can be further supported by numerous studies which showed duplicated result that socially-prescribed perfectionism is

associated with high level of burnout (Appleton et al., 2009; Hill et al 2008), however this study failed to identify with the above literature, as the correlation between “socially-prescribed perfectionism” and “burnout” is insignificant. Since p value >0.05 , hence the results are by chance.

8. Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis was carried out on 75 descriptive responses (n=75) received. The responses are classified into 2 categories- perfectionism and burnout. Following are some major reasons driving an individual towards perfectionism and burnout. They are classified into few themes as follows.

Table II Thematic analysis of Qualitative Responses

Category	Themes
Perfectionism	Goal Achievement
	Satisfaction
	Motivation
	Desire for continuous improvement
	Positive attitude/Optimism
	Fear of Failure
	Sense of preparedness
Burnout	Lack of appreciation
	Work life balance
	Poor work environment
	Workload
	No motivation
	Ambiguity in task allotted
	Other- no significant monetary gains, cultural difference

The qualitative responses were broadly bifurcated into two segments i.e., driving forces of perfectionism and major issues resulting in burnout. The basic themes were identified after analyzing all the qualitative responses of the respondents, thereafter responses are clustered against the respective code/theme.

According to the responses, the driving force for perfectionism has more to do with an individual's own desire to attain his target and urge for continuous improvement. Also, the reasons behind individuals suffering from burnout are more related to the issues faced in work setup - office environment, workload, ambiguity in tasks allotted. Issues related to personal space - lack of recognition, no motivation were also witnessed to some extent during the qualitative analysis of the descriptive responses.

9. Conclusion

Personal burnout showed a weak negative correlation (-0.11) with "self-oriented perfectionism" but a low positive correlation (0.02, 0.03) with "other oriented perfectionism" and "socially prescribed perfectionism". "Personal burnout" depicts a significant relationship with "self-oriented perfectionism" (p -value <0.05) but an insignificant relationship with "other oriented perfectionism" and "socially prescribed perfectionism" (p -value >0.05).

Therefore, more an individual is "self-oriented perfectionist", less likely that he will face "personal burnout", hence this relationship is statistically significant and can further be supported by research (Edbrooke-Childs, Julian &Stoeber, Joachim. 2010) which says that "self-oriented perfectionism" was associated with lower level of "burnout" and higher level of "engagement".

"Work burnout" showed a positive correlation with "self-oriented perfectionism" (0.02), "other oriented perfectionism" (0.08) and "socially prescribed perfectionism" (0.11). But it showed a statistically insignificant relationship with all the three types of "perfectionism". (p -value >0.05)

According to Edbrooke-Childs, Julian &Stoeber, Joachim (2010), "self-oriented and other-oriented perfectionism" was not associated with "burnout" at work, which is in-line with the results of this study. "Client burnout" showed a very weak positive correlation with "self-oriented perfectionism" (0.00), "other oriented perfectionism" (0.19) and "socially prescribed perfectionism" (0.18). It depicted a statistically insignificant relationship with "self-oriented perfectionism" and "socially prescribed perfectionism". (p -value >0.05). "Client burnout" has a statistically significant relationship with "Other oriented perfectionism". (p -value <0.05), which means the more a person is "other oriented", more likely it is that he will deal with "client burnout".

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