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Academic Procrastination and Its Impact on the Mental Health of College Students: A Correlation Study

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Abstract

In the current scenario, students in their respective colleges often exhibit procrastination in the academic field, which can have adverse effects on their mental health, including psychological, emotional, and social well-being. To address this issue, the present study examines the relationship between academic procrastination and mental health, as well as its dimensions, among college-going students in the Varanasi and Prayagraj districts of Uttar Pradesh, which has significant implications for students' academic performance. The study's sample comprised 141 college students from the Varanasi and Prayagraj districts of Uttar Pradesh. Data were collected using purposive sampling with standardized tools such as, Academic Procrastination Scale, by McCloskey (2011), and the Mental Health Continuum-Short Form is taken from Keyes's (2002). Then, using SPSS, the data were examined using descriptive statistics, simple linear regression (SLR), and Pearson's product-moment correlation. The findings revealed a significant negative correlation between academic procrastination and mental health and its dimensions, suggesting potential strategies for addressing it in academic settings.

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INTRODUCTION

Procrastination is understood as a person's practice or habit of completing less important tasks instead of urgent and important ones, or doing more enjoyable things instead of less enjoyable ones, as well as completing high-priority tasks at the last minute (Salem Press Encyclopedia of Health, 2016). Other researchers (Steel, 2007) interpret procrastination as a common and destructive form of self-regulation, which is not fully understood. Moreover, procrastination is defined as a pathological problem of clinically significant lack of self-control (Hocker et al., 2012; Smoletz, 2019).Academic procrastination, which is typical for schoolchildren and students, is manifested in the postponement of academic assignments, preparation for tests, pass/fail exams, and exams (Garzón Umerenkova et al.,2020), as a voluntary delay of starting or completing important educational tasks (Schouwenburg, 2004)

Delaying, postponing, or putting off a task or decision is the fundamental component of procrastination. It was first mentioned in writing in 800 BC by the Greek poet Hesiod, and in the "Bhagavad Gita," which was written in 500 BC, it was mentioned in the context of eastern philosophy (Steel, 2007). Procrastination has drawn the attention of prominent psychologists and intellectuals in the modern era, including William James, who told his friend Carl Stumpf, another psychologist, that "nothing is so fatiguing as the eternal hanging of an unfinished task" (James, 1926). Procrastination is described as an individual's inclination to put off an action vital to them while being aware of the negative consequences (Steel, 2007). Procrastination is derived from the Latin words "Pro" (ahead) and "Crastinus" (tomorrow) (Mish, 1994). So, procrastination is the optimistic postponement of a task until later in the hopes of completing it successfully. Solomon and Rothblum (1984) defined procrastination as the act of delaying tasks unnecessarily, leading to feelings of stress and discomfort. On the other hand, Procrastination has typically been defined as a trait or behavioural disposition to postpone or delay performing a task or making decisions (Milgram et al., 1998). Ellis and Knaus (2002) defined procrastination as a complex psychological phenomenon as a combination of dysfunctional behavior, the avoidance of tasks, and the use of excuses to justify delay and avoid feelings of guilt.

Academic procrastination is the term used to describe students who have a habit of delaying, avoiding, or putting off their academic obligations. It is the realization that one is expected to accomplish an academic task and even intends to do so, but cannot achieve the outcome within the allotted time (Senecal et al., 1995). One type of academic procrastination has been characterized by Solomon and Rothblum (1984) as delaying important academic activities such as test preparation, term paper writing, school administration, and attendance requirements. Academic procrastination is an illogical inclination to procrastinate at the beginning or completion of academic work, as defined by Yong (2010).

Mental health can be defined as the absence of mental disease or it can be defined as a state of being that also includes the biological, psychological or social factors which contribute to an individual's mental state and ability to function within the environment(Carter et al., 1959; World Health Organization, 1948; Bhugra et al., 2013) For example, (WHO, 2001) includes realizing one's potential, the ability to cope with normal life stresses and community contributions as core components of mental health. Other definitions extend beyond this to also include intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development (Health Education Authority, 1997), positive self-perception, feelings of self-worth, and physical health (Bhugra et al., 2013; Mental Health Foundation, 2008), and intrapersonal harmony (Alonso, 1960).

Academic procrastination is widely recognized as a self-regulatory failure that significantly impacts students' psychological functioning and academic outcomes. Studies have consistently shown that procrastination in the academic domain often leads to negative consequences for students' mental health, including feelings of distress, anxiety, and guilt arising from incomplete tasks and perceptions of incompetence (Kerbauy, 2001). These emotional responses can impair students' learning processes and academic performance (Sampaio & Bariani, 2011).

Solomon and Rothblum (1984) suggested that students are more likely to delay tasks they perceive as unpleasant. However, more recent literature indicates that procrastination may also occur in activities that students enjoy, pointing to underlying emotional regulation difficulties. Academic procrastination is now increasingly conceptualized as a dysfunctional coping mechanism associated with psychological stress, anxiety, depression, and reduced satisfaction with life (Mortazavi, 2016; Stead et al., 2010). These emotional consequences highlight the broad mental health burden imposed by chronic procrastination behavior.

Research has further demonstrated that procrastination is related to various health-related and psychological symptoms. Ferrari (2010) and Ferrari et al. (1995) reported that habitual procrastinators experienced more physical symptoms, made more frequent visits to medical professionals, and reported higher levels of stress. Psychological capital has also been found to play a mediating role, where higher levels of emotional, social, and psychological well-being reduce academic procrastination (Asfa et al., 2018). Similarly, Ahmad and Munir (2022) identified a strong negative correlation between academic procrastination and psychological well-being, suggesting that students who frequently procrastinate are more likely to exhibit poor mental health indicators.

Taken together, the literature points to a consistent and multifaceted link between academic procrastination and mental health outcomes, including specific dimensions such as emotional, psychological, and social well-being. These findings support the need for a more nuanced understanding of how procrastination affects different aspects of students' mental health across diverse populations.

Rationale of the Study

A review of existing literature reveals that the impact of academic procrastination on mental health has been extensively examined in Western countries, consistently demonstrating a significant negative correlation between procrastination and the mental health of college students (Ferrari, 2010; Ferrari et al., 1995; Kerbauy, 2001). Several non-Indian studies have also explored the relationship between academic procrastination and specific dimensions of mental health, such as emotional, psychological, and social well-being (Ahmad & Munir, 2022; Asfa et al., 2018; Mortazavi, 2016; Stead et al., 2010). However, there remains a noticeable gap in research within the Indian context, where such associations are relatively underexplored. To address this gap, the present study aimed to examine the relationship between academic procrastination and mental health, including its key dimensions, psychological, emotional, and social well-being among Indian college-going students.

The following objectives of this study have been framed.

- To study the correlation between academic procrastination and mental health.
- To study the correlation between academic procrastination and emotional well-being.
- To study the correlation between academic procrastination and psychological well-being.
- To study the correlation between academic procrastination and social well-being.

Based on the objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated.

- Academic procrastination would significantly correlate with mental health.
- Academic procrastination would significantly correlate with emotional well-being.
- Academic procrastination would significantly correlate with psychological well-being.
- Academic procrastination would significantly correlate with social well-being.

METHOD

Research Design

The study uses a co relational research design and a descriptive survey method. Characteristics of the population or phenomenon under study are described by descriptive research. One kind of non-experimental research is correlational research, where two variables are measured and the statistical relationship (i.e., correlation) between them is evaluated with little to no effort to control for unrelated variables.

Sample

Purposive sampling was employed to collect data from college students in Uttar Pradesh. The sample comprised 141 students, aged between 18 and 35 years, who were enrolled in undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programs across the districts of Varanasi and Prayagraj.

Measures

Academic Procrastination Scale

Students' academic procrastination was assessed using the Academic Procrastination Scale, which was created by McCloskey (2011). Six traits of a procrastinator, psychological beliefs about talents, attentional distraction, social variables, time management skills, laziness, and personal initiative are the basis for the scale's twenty-five items. A five-point Likert-type scale was used to rate the items, with one denoting disagreement and five denoting agreement. With α =.95, it has demonstrated a high level of reliability.

The Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (MHC-SF)

The Mental Health Continuum–Short Form (MHC–SF), developed by Keyes (2002), comprises 14 Likert-scaled items derived from the original Mental Health Continuum–Long Form. The scale assesses three dimensions of positive mental health: emotional well-being (items 1–3), social well-being (items 4–8), and psychological well-being (items 9–14). These dimensions reflect hedonic and eudemonic aspects of functioning. The MHC–SF demonstrates satisfactory reliability, with test–retest correlations averaging 0.68 over three consecutive 3-month intervals and 0.65 over 9 months. Additionally, the overall scale and its subscales exhibit high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.80.

Procedure

Before beginning data collection, the participants gave their written consent. The participants received all information about this study both orally and in writing. Only after obtaining their consent to participate in the study was further processing carried out. Before administering the test, a rapport was built with the participants. The tools were scored following the scoring guidelines for each scale.

RESULTS

Table 1. Summary of the correlation results of Academic Procrastination and Mental Health and its dimensions.

	Psychological wellbeing	Emotional wellbeing	Social wellbeing	Mental health
Academic Procrastination	-.377**	-.243**	-.278**	-.343**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The obtained data were statistically analyzed on SPSS-24 (Statistical Package for Social Science) using descriptive statistics, bivariate correlation, and regression analysis. Table 1 represents the correlation analysis of the data.

The results of the correlational analysis of Academic procrastination with mental health (dimensions and overall) are presented in the following Table 1 reveals that academic procrastination is significantly negatively associated with psychological wellbeing (r=-.377, p<0.01), emotional wellbeing (r=-.243, p<0.01), social wellbeing (r=-.278, p<0.01) and overall mental health (r=-.377, p<0.01).These results imply that there is a negative correlation between academic procrastination, mental health, psychological wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, and social wellbeing. This means that as academic procrastination increases in college-going students ,it lowers their mental health, psychological, emotional, and social well-being.

Table 2. Regression analysis of the predictors of Academic Procrastination

Variable	**β**	**R^2change**	**Adjusted R^2**	**F**	**p**
Mental health	-.343	.117	.111	18.483	.000
Psychological wellbeing	-.377	.142	.136	23.045	.000
Emotional wellbeing	-.243	.059	.052	8.731	.004
Social wellbeing	-.278	.077	.070	11.601	.001

Table 2 depicts that academic procrastination is a significant predictor of mental health with a coefficient value of -.343 (F = 18.483, p<.001); this represents that academic procrastination explains an 11.7% variance in mental health. Academic procrastination is a significant predictor of psychological wellbeing with a coefficient value of -.377 (F=23.045, p<.001); this represents that academic procrastination explains a 14.2% variance in psychological wellbeing. Academic procrastination is a significant predictor of emotional wellbeing with a coefficient value of -.243 (F=8.731, p<.01); this

represents that academic procrastination explains a 5.9% variance in emotional wellbeing. Academic procrastination is a significant predictor of social wellbeing with a coefficient value of -.278 (F=11.601, p<.001); this represents that academic procrastination explains a 7.7% variance in social wellbeing. These results indicate that academic procrastination is a significant predictor of mental health, psychological wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, and social wellbeing, so our four hypotheses state that 'Academic procrastination would significantly predict mental health, psychological wellbeing, emotional wellbeing, and social wellbeing is accepted.

DISCUSSION

The present study aims to establish the association between Indian college-going students' academic procrastination, mental health, and its dimensions, including psychological, emotional, and social well-being. The main objectives are operationalized based on a thorough literature review and research gap of the study, to study the correlation between academic procrastination and mental health, to study the correlation between academic procrastination and emotional well-being, to study the correlation between academic procrastination and psychological well-being and to study the correlation between academic procrastination and social well-being. Overall, the findings corroborate the hypotheses of association among variables and indicate that academic procrastination would significantly correlate with mental health and its dimensions among college-going students of India.

The findings of this study provide valuable information on the relationship between academic procrastination and mental health and its dimensions among college-going students, which adds to the growing body of research that investigates how psychological variables impact their mental health. The findings indicate a significant negative correlation between academic procrastination, mental health, and all its dimensions. Procrastination has been associated with several negative mental health factors. Previous western literature supports that Solomon and Rothblum (1984) found a high correlation between it and symptoms of melancholy, anxiety, low self-esteem, illogical thought processes, and unproductive study habits. According to Tice and Baumeister (1997), procrastinating results in temporary respite but long-term psychological problems, such as worse performance and health consequences. According to another study, procrastination is associated with negative emotions including guilt, shame, and frustration, all of which have been shown to impair emotional well-being (Blunt & Pychyl, 2000).

The present study also found the negative correlation between academic procrastination and emotional, psychological, and social well-being of college-going students, which indicates that when students commit to procrastination in their respective academics, it turns to adversely affect the emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Previous findings provide supportive evidence that higher levels of emotional, social, and psychological well-being reduce academic procrastination (Asfa et al., 2018). Similarly, Ahmad and Munir (2022) identified a strong negative correlation between academic procrastination and psychological well-being, suggesting that students who frequently procrastinate are more likely to exhibit poor mental health indicators.

Simple regression analysis confirmed that Academic procrastination significantly predicts diminished mental health and its dimensions. In essence, increased academic procrastination leads to a significant decrease in mental health and its dimensions. This finding also aligns with previous research. Academic procrastination is widely recognized as a self-regulatory failure that significantly impacts students' psychological functioning and academic outcomes. Studies have consistently shown that procrastination in the academic domain often leads to negative consequences for students' mental health, including feelings of distress, anxiety, and guilt arising from incomplete tasks and perceptions of incompetence (Kerbauy, 2001).In addition, Procrastination has an impact on anxiety, depression, and a reduction in life satisfaction in several areas. Academic procrastination and low psychological well-being are generally linked; students who postpone often have low psychological well-being (Stead et al., 2010; Mortazavi, 2016).

CONCLUSION

This study revealed a significant negative correlation between academic procrastination and mental health among college-going students of Indian

origin, with higher levels of procrastination associated with lower psychological, emotional, and social well-being. These findings indicate that procrastination affects not only academic performance but also overall mental health emphasizing the need for early identification and intervention. However, the study is limited by its relatively small and homogeneous sample size (141 students), reliance on self-report measures, and cross-sectional design, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings and limit the ability to draw causal conclusions. Despite these limitations, the results highlight important implications for educational institutions. There is a pressing need to integrate time management training, mental health awareness, and targeted counseling programs within student support services to address procrastination and enhance student well-being. Future research should explore these relationships using larger, more diverse samples and longitudinal approaches to better understand the long-term effects of academic procrastination on mental health.

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