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Investigating The Relationship Between Perfectionism With Medical Students' Negligence And Mental Health

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ABSTRACT

Background: Perfectionism is defined as a set of very high standards for performance, which is accompanied with negative evaluations, criticism and blame. In fact perfectionist people are those who think they can and must perform in an exact way and whatever which is not exact is not satisfactory in their view. **Objective:** The present research aims to investigate the relationship between perfectionism with of negligence and students' mental health. **Methods:** Regarding the aim and nature of the subject, this is a descriptive correlational research. The statistical population of the research includes medical students of Hormozgan University of Medical Sciences. The members of the sample were organized through random sampling from students in different years of university. The amount of the sample for the present research, based on Cochran formula, was 212 among which 181 completed the questionnaire. In order to collect the data required from mental health questionnaires, perfectionism questionnaire and negligence questionnaire were used. To analyze the data the statistical methods of multiple regression and Pearson Correlation Coefficient was employed. **Results:** The results indicated that there is a significant relationship between the subscales of perfectionism including focus on errors; discipline and organization, understanding force form the parents, goal-orientedness and rumination and students' mental health. Also the overall scale of negligence and the overall scale of perfectionism had the ability to predict the mental health. In investigation, the variable subscales of preparedness for exam and homework from the negligence variable, and the subscale of rumination from the perfectionism variable had the ability to predict the mental health. **Conclusion:** Therefore it is suggested that in addition to identifying students vulnerable to the danger of unhealthy perfectionism, it should be attempted to lead these students towards healthy perfectionism in the form of team trainings and clinical interventions. Also with decreasing anxiety caused by students' fear and perfectionism, one can stop negligence.

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INTRODUCTION

Perfectionism is defined as a set of very high standards for performance, which is accompanied with negative evaluations, criticism and blame (Frost 1990). In fact perfectionist people are those who think they can and must perform in an exact way and whatever which is not exact is not satisfactory in their view (Namjoo *et al* 2012). An investigation of theoretical and research literature indicates the difference between the two basic forms of perfectionism, which are usually are referred to as positive and negative perfectionism (Terry-Short *et al*, 1995) active and passive perfectionism (Edkinz and Parker 1996 as quoted in Jahanbakhsh *et al* 2013), normal and abnormal perfectionism (Hemachek 1978) and healthy and unhealthy perfectionism (Stump and Parker, 2002; Davies 2009).

From Stoeber and Otto's (2006) point of view healthy perfectionists are people show a high level of perfectionist attempts with a low level of perfectionist anxiety. In contrast unhealthy perfectionists are people with a high level of perfectionist attempts and anxiety, and non-perfectionists have low levels of perfectionist attempts. Hemachek (1978), too, introduces abnormal perfectionism in contrast to normal perfectionism. This type of perfectionism occurs when people try for extremist and unrealistic factors and criticize and evaluate their performance too often. For these people no work is completely good and they are incapable to be satisfied by

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what has been done in its natural form or even if it is better than other works. These people are afraid of the feeling of failure, and do not feel satisfied when even a small mistake occurs. In fact a kind of negative feeling is born in these people, which is an aspect of mental distress and includes a variety of negative moods such as wrath, insult, hatred, sin, fear and anger (Watson *et al*, 1998).

The results of different researches show that perfectionism can be seen as a mediator variable in many mental and social problems. For example in a study by Stoeber and Rambow (2007) about the relationship between positive and negative perfectionism and progress motivation and educational performance in students, it was identified that positive attempts for perfection have a relation with the hope for success and that negative reactions to defects have a relation with fear of failure. Also attempts for perfection had a relationship with the hope for success and negative reaction to defects had a relationship with fear of failure. There was also a relation between attempts for perfection and higher educational performance, in a way that these people enjoyed higher scores. In this study there was not a significant relationship between negative perfectionism and educational performance. In a research about mental patterns of perfectionism and confirmation-seeking in depression on healthy, depressed and obsessive groups, Sam Khaniani *et al* (2003) realized that there is a significant relation among the three depressed, obsessive and normal groups in sentence completion test, dysfunctional attitudes scale and confirmation-seeking. Also the depressed group has a significant difference from the normal group but the difference between the two depressed and obsessive groups was not significant. In investigating the relation between perfectionism and social anxiety in students, Vardy *et al* (2000) realized that there is significant relation between perfectionism and social support; also there is a positive significant relation between perfectionism and social support and its two subscales: social avoidance and fear of evaluation. Shirzadi *et al* (2003), too, investigating the simple and multiple relations of variables of perfectionism and anxiety and depression with migraine in students concluded that perfectionism, anxiety and depression have a positive and significant relation with migraine. Also, multiple correlation of perfectionism, anxiety and depression with migraine was significant.

In a research to investigate the relation between perfectionism and loneliness and Gilan medical students' life quality, Khalatbari *et al* (2012) found out that perfectionism and loneliness give us a standard explanation of life quality, so higher life quality have a higher relation with loneliness and low perfectionism. Namjoo *et al* (2012) investigated the relation between perfectionism, defensive styles and depression symptoms in students. The results indicated that is a positive significant correlation between the three aspects of perfectionism (self-oriented, other-oriented and community-oriented) and depression symptoms and uncompromised defensive styles (neurotic and immature).

Mirzaee *et al* (2013), too, investigated the role of positive and negative perfectionism, efficacy, anxiety and problem with regulation in predicting behavioral negligence and decision making. The results indicated that there is a positive relation between negative perfectionism and behavioral negligence ($r = 0.179$) and decision making ($r = 0.368$). Therefore, regarding the results of these researches and the importance of medical students' mental health, as future doctors, and also lack adequate evidence about the relation between aspects of perfectionism and students' mental health, this research aims to investigate the relation between perfectionism and aspects of negligence and medical students' mental health.

Methodology:

Regarding the aim and nature of the subject, this is a descriptive correlational research. The statistical population of the research includes medical students of Hormozgan University of Medical Sciences. The members of the sample were organized through random sampling from students in different years of university. The amount of the sample for the present research, based on Cochran formula, was 212 among which 181 completed the questionnaire. In order to collect the mental health data in this research, general health questionnaire was used, which has been compiled in order to identify mental disorders in different centers and places. This 60-question questionnaire includes four subscales of physical symptoms, anxiety, disorder in social performance and depression. The content validity of this questionnaire was confirmed by some of the professors and experts, and its reliability, using Cronbach's alpha, was 0.84 for the subscale physical symptoms, 0.71 for anxiety, 0.84 for social performance, 0.84 for depression and 0.90 for the entire questionnaire. Also, in order to study the perfectionist variable in the present research Hill's *et al* (1978) perfectionism scale was used, this questionnaire has 8 subscales which are discipline and organization, goal-orientedness, attempt for being perfect, high standards for others, need for confirmation, focus on errors and understanding the force from parents. The validity of this questionnaire was confirmed by some of the professors and experts, and its reliability was 0.80 using Cronbach's alpha. The tool for evaluating educational negligence was educational negligence scale by Solomon & Roth Blum (1984). This scale has 27 items which investigate three factors. The first factor is preparation for the exams, which includes 8 questions. The second is preparation for the homework, which includes 11 items. And the third factor is preparation for final-term articles, which includes 8 items. In the present research the validity of negligence scale was confirmed by some of the professors and experts, and its Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.79. Finally, after collecting the information, the data were

analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Pearson Correlation Coefficient and Multiple Regression).

Results:

The First Hypothesis: there is a significant relation between aspects of perfectionism and negligence:

In order to investigate the relation between perfectionism and negligence, three subscales of mental health and eight subscales of perfectionism were analyzed by Pearson correlation coefficient, and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlation coefficient between aspects of perfectionism and aspects of negligence

		Focus on Errors	High Standards for Others	Confirmation-seeking	Discipline and organization	Understanding Parents' Force	Goal-Orientedness	Rumination	Attempt for being perfect	perfectionism
Preparation for Exams	r	0/223	0/128	0/103	-0/161	0/264	-0/153	0/302	0/043	0/136
	P	0/003	0/087	0/167	0/030	0/001	0/041	0/000	0/562	0/068
Preparation for Homework	r	0/238	0/189	0/154	-0/200	0/258	-0/133	0/217	-0/103	0/121
	P	0/001	0/011	0/39	0/007	0/001	0/074	0/003	0/170	0/106
Preparation for Article	r	0/175	0/127	0/185	-0/098	0/192	0/074	0/177	-0/058	0/119
	P	0/019	0/090	0/013	0/191	0/010	0/326	0/017	0/436	0/111
Negligence	r	0/212	0/183	0/174	0/213	0/282	-0/139	0/265	-0/064	0/132
	P	0/004	0/014	0/019	0/004	0/001	0/063	0/001	0/393	0/077

As it is shown in Table 1 the aspect of preparation for exam had significant relation with aspects of focus on errors ($r = 0/223$), discipline and organization ($r = -0/161$), understanding parents' force ($r = 0/264$), goal-orientedness ($r = 0/153$) and rumination ($r = 0/302$). Also the aspect of preparation for homework had significant relation with aspects of focus on errors ($r = 0/238$), high standards for others ($r = 0/189$), confirmation-seeking ($r = 0/154$), discipline and organization ($r = -0/200$), understanding parents' force ($r = 0/258$) and rumination ($r = 0/217$). On the other hand there was significant relation between preparation for article and focus on errors ($r = 0/175$), confirmation-seeking ($r = 0/185$), understanding parents' force ($r = 0/192$) and rumination ($r = 0/177$). Although the overall score for negligence and perfectionism was not significant ($P \geq 0/05$, $r = 0/132$).

Second Hypothesis: there is significant relation between perfectionism and mental health:

In order to investigate the relation between perfectionism and mental health, four subscales of mental health and eight subscales of perfectionism were analyzed by Pearson correlation coefficient, and the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation coefficient between aspects of perfectionism and aspects of mental health

		Focus on Errors	High Standards for Others	Confirmation-seeking	Discipline and organization	Understanding Parents' Force	Goal-Orientedness	Rumination	Attempt for being perfect	perfectionism
Physical symptoms	r	0/193	0/173	0/186	-0/086	0/271	-0/104	0/303	0/023	0/174
	p	0/010	0/020	0/012	0/252	0/001	0/165	0/001	0/759	0/020

anxiety	r	0/322	0/279	0/285	-0/021	0/329	0/047	0/391	0/034	0/282
	p	0/001	0/001	0/001	0/780	0/001	0/527	0/001	0/654	0/001
Social performance	r	0/168	0/145	0/224	0/101	0/190	0/022	0/303	0/122	0/223
	p	0/024	0/052	0/002	0/178	0/011	0/773	0/001	0/103	0/003
depression	r	0/384	0/163	0/261	-0/043	0/249	-0/068	0/318	-0/089	0/224
	p	0/001	0/029	0/001	0/569	0/001	0/367	0/001	0/237	0/002
General health	r	0/321	0/225	0/283	-0/018	0/308	-0/061	0/389	0/020	0/266
	p	0/001	0/002	0/001	0/807	0/001	0/419	0/001	0/787	0/001

As it can be seen in Table 2 there was positive significant relation ($P \leq 0/05$) between the subscale of physical symptoms and focus on errors ($r = 0/193$), high standards for others ($r = 0/173$), confirmation-seeking ($r = 0/186$), understanding parents' force ($r = 0/271$) and rumination ($r = 0/303$). Also there was a positive significant relation between the variable of anxiety and focus on errors ($r = 0/322$), high standards for others ($r = 0/279$), confirmation-seeking ($r = 0/285$), understanding parents' force ($r = 0/329$) and rumination ($r = 0/391$). There was positive significant relation between disorder in social performance and the variables of focus on errors ($r = 0/168$), confirmation-seeking ($r = 0/224$), understanding parents' force ($r = 0/190$) and rumination ($r = 0/303$). Also there was significant relation between depression and focus on errors ($r = 0/384$), high standards for others ($r = 0/163$), understanding parents' force ($r = 0/261$) and rumination ($r = 0/318$). The overall scale of perfectionism and the overall scale of mental health had significant relation ($P \leq 0/05$, $r = 0/266$).

The third hypothesis: can perfectionism predict mental health?:

In order to determine the amount of predictability of perfectionism variables on mental health a model of multi variable regression was used, in which perfectionism variables were considered as independent variables and the overall mental health score as the dependent variable, and the effect of eight aspects of perfectionism on mental health was investigated. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: the results of mental health regression on aspects of perfectionism

Predicting variables	Mental health				
	B	β	P	R	R^2
Focus on errors	0/120	0/051	0/658	0/21	0/448
High standards for others	0/206	0/062	0/529		
Confirmation-seeking	0/021	0/008	0/945		
Discipline and organization	0/201	0/080	0/466		
Understanding force	0/082	0/033	0/752		
Goal - orientedness	-0/676	-0/212	0/066		
Rumination	1/141	0/384	0/004		
Attempt for being perfect	-0/543	-0/136	0/128		
Overall scale of perfectionism	0/112	0/231	0/001		

The results of Table 3 show that among all scales of perfectionism only rumination had predictability for mental health ($\beta = 0/38$ and $P < 0/004$) and all the other variables did not have predictability for mental health in the above model ($P \geq 0/05$). Also the results of this table show that all the variables of perfectionism altogether predict 21 percent of mental health variance ($R^2 = 0/21$). Therefore as it can be seen in Table 3 in general perfectionism scale ($\beta = 0/231$ and $P < 0/001$) predicts mental health significantly, but this predict is about only 20 percent of mental health. This result is indicative of the fact that the factor of perfectionism should be considered side by side other effective variables in mental health.

Discussion:

In the present research the relation between aspects of perfectionism and their role of predictability for students' mental health was investigated. Using Pearson correlation, the correlation between perfectionism variable and mental health showed a positive significant relation. Also there was significant relation between aspects of perfectionism and negligence. However, in order to answer the question whether perfectionism can predict mental health regression analysis was used. The results of this analysis indicated that perfectionism and especially the aspect of rumination can predict mental health. Therefore, a significant part of individual's mental health is explained by the factor of perfectionism; in other words with increasing perfectionism the amount of mental health decreases, and therefore with decreasing perfectionism, the amount of mental health increases. Of

course it is possible to define a range and scope for it; it is possible that with extremist decrease of perfectionism, mental health decreases as well. The findings of the present research are in line with findings of Stoeber and Rambow (2007), Vardy *et al* (2000), Shirzadi *et al* (2003), Khalatbari *et al* (2012), Namjoo *et al* (2012) and Mirzaee *et al* (2013).

In the study by Stoeber and Rambow (2007) it was determined that positive attempt for perfection has relation with hope for success and negative reaction to defect has relation with fear of failure. Also attempt for perfection had a relation with hope for success and negative reaction to defect has relation with fear of failure. Also Vardy *et al* (2000) realized that there is a positive significant relation between perfection and social support and its two subscales – including social avoidance and fear of evaluation. Shirzadi *et al* (2003), too, investigating the simple and multiple relations of variables of perfectionism and anxiety and depression with migraine in students concluded that perfectionism, anxiety and depression have a positive and significant relation with migraine. Also, multiple correlation of perfectionism, anxiety and depression with migraine was significant. In fact referring to the findings of Stoeber and Rambow (2007), Vardy *et al* (2000) and Shirzadi *et al* (2003) it can be said that unhealthy perfectionism leads to an increase in self-expectation and increases fear of failure, and the same factor leads to increasing anxiety and students' negligence, and finally this mutual relation between perfectionism, anxiety and negligence influences their mental health. Also Khalatbari *et al* (2012), investigating the relation between perfectionism and loneliness and Gilan medical students' life quality, concluded that perfectionism and loneliness highly explain life quality therefore the higher life quality, the lower loneliness and perfectionism. The results of the research by Namjoo *et al* (2012) also indicated that there is positive significant correlation among all the three aspects of perfectionism (self-oriented, other-oriented and community-oriented) and depression symptoms and uncompromised defensive styles (neurotic and immature). The findings of Mirzaee *et al* (2013), too, indicated that there is a positive relation between negative perfectionism and behavioral negligence.

Conclusion:

To sum up from the review of literature and also the findings of the present research it can be said that there is a significant correlation and relation between perfectionism and negligence, on the one hand, and perfectionism and mental health, on the other hand. Since students' and in particular medical students' mental health - as future doctors - is of high importance and needs constant control by authorities and experts to offer new findings and strategies to improve it, therefore it is suggested that in addition to identifying students vulnerable to the danger of unhealthy perfectionism, it should be attempted to lead these students towards healthy perfectionism in the form of team trainings and clinical interventions. Also with decreasing anxiety caused by students' fear and perfectionism, one can stop negligence.

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