

Procrastination and Self-Esteem among University Students

Marium Saleem and Rafia Rafique
Department of Psychology and Applied Psychology
University of the Punjab, Lahore

The major objective of this correlational study was to explore whether an association exists between procrastination and self-esteem among university students. It also aimed at finding out gender and birth order differences in procrastination and self-esteem. The primary hypothesis was that there will be a negative association between procrastination and self-esteem. Moreover it was hypothesized that there would be significant gender and birth order difference in procrastination and self-esteem. Besides collecting demographic information through a self-constructed questionnaire, Lay Procrastination Scale (Lay, 1986) and Rosenberg Self-esteem Questionnaire (Rosenberg 1965) were administered on a sample of 80 (39 male, 41 female) university students. Reliability for the indigenous sample for Lay Procrastination Scale and Rosenberg Self-esteem questionnaire was found to be $\alpha.85$ and $\alpha.80$. Results highlighted that a significant negative correlation between procrastination and self-esteem exists among university students ($r = -.35, p < .01$). Enhancements of self-esteem through the use of psychological interventions are being proposed.

Keywords: procrastination, self-esteem, gender, birth order

Procrastination can be an incapacitating and chronic problem for college and university students. Students procrastinate as they like to enjoy spare time, long term deadlines, and extracurricular activities which ultimately lead to their academic incompetence. Procrastination not only affects student grades, but also academic performance, thereby creating academic and career problems. Procrastination prevents students from reaching their objectives and goals; it inculcates a sense of discomfort, as things start accumulating. Procrastination keeps a student wedged in problems and tasks that prevent them from moving ahead in life; students find it difficult to focus on performing other tasks till they have completed the one in hand, which further effects quality of work in other spheres of life.

Different researchers have conceptualized procrastination differently. Hoover (2005) has conceptualized procrastination as not being able to set goal priorities and hence not being able to complete assignments on time. According to Lay (1986) procrastination means putting off something which is central to reach some goal. However, the fact is that procrastinating students earn lower scores than the non-procrastinators, perhaps due to underestimating the amount of time needed to perform tasks (Bender, 2006). Normally, the procrastinator will work on less important responsibility, rather than fulfilling the more important obligations, or he may use his or her time extravagantly in some minor activity or pleasure. In most cases, procrastinators keep themselves ready to work, but end up avoiding the activity. Hence, procrastination is avoiding a task that needs to be accomplished on precedence (Yaakub, 2000).

Procrastination considerably wastes significant time, if there is something supposed to be performed (Hobbs, 2008). In modern industrial society, time and punctuality are considered important standards. Those who procrastinate have found to carry a heavy cost due to inability to abide by these values, whereby effecting all domains of life. Psychological repercussions of delaying or putting

off something are that it creates anxiety, that in turn can effects attention and concentration. Without proper concentration and attention, quality of performance and work is definite to fall. Researches point in the direction that procrastination raises students' anxiety and sinks their self-esteem. The most convincing research in this regard was done by Burka and Yuens (1983). According to their model of procrastination, low self-esteem is a central constituent of procrastination. A person who procrastinates starts feeling powerless and hopeless; his confidence suffers and future seems dark. Procrastinators usually avoid revealing information about their abilities, prefer menial tasks, make poor time estimates, tend to focus on the past, and do not act on their intentions. Interestingly, research has confirmed that all these characteristics have been related to low self-esteem.

On the other end, people with low self-esteem are more vulnerable to the psychological impact of everyday lives. They are less likely to have satisfactory self-knowledge. They suffer from a motivational conflict. They easily get manipulated as they are flexible, and are strongly affected by persuasion and influence. Hence, these facts are more likely to delay their task completion as well as responsibilities (Baumeister, 1999).

Burka and Yuen (1983) associated low sense of self-esteem as a personality trait most commonly present among procrastinators. Various theoretical approaches endorse that low self-esteem as a concomitant of procrastination. Burka and Yuen (1983) highlight that procrastination is a self-induced strategy that guards against a susceptible sense of self-esteem. Delaying of things has a buffering effect for those with unsteady feelings of self-worth (Burka & Yuen, 1982). Beswick, Rothblum and Mann (1988) gave psychological explanations for procrastination. The researchers studied 245 students, multiple regression analyses depicted that self-esteem and, to some extent, indecision accounted for significant portion of the variance in procrastination. Ferrari (1991) found that procrastinators report feelings of low self-esteem and greater social anxiety. Significant gender differences were reported by the researchers: female procrastinators had significantly lower self-esteem compared to female non-procrastinators.

Ferrari (1994) in his further research on dysfunctional procrastination and its association with self-esteem, interpersonal dependency, and self-defeating behaviors. He found that low self-esteem, dependency and self-defeating acts were significantly associated with procrastination in young adults.

An important research conducted by Lay (1986) revealed procrastinators' behavior. Lay found that procrastination was found to be associated with disorganization. Moreover no significant association was found between procrastination with need-achievement, level of energy and self-esteem. Lay (1987) found that procrastinators were high on the neurotic disorganization scale and also on the rebelliousness scale and had personal projects which, overall, were characterized by high stress, high difficulty, low progress, and low self esteem. Gender differences were found as far as low self-esteem is concerned.

Solomon and Rothblum (1984) in their research endorsed that academic procrastination is not only a deficit in study habits or time management skills, and involved an overall complex interplay of behavioral, cognitive, and affective components. However procrastination was found to be significantly related to feelings of low self esteem.

Ferrari and Emmons (1995) concluded that procrastinators have low self-esteem and delay task completion because they believe they lack the ability to achieve task success. People suffering from inferiority complex may believe that any failure to perform up to the mark inculcates overall feelings of inadequacy in an individual. In order to protect one's self-esteem and people may self-handicap by procrastinating in order to give an external reason for their delay. (Steel, 2007) Baumeister (1999) on the other hand, observed that people with high self-esteem know more about themselves; this knowledge is more stable over time and less marred by internal contradictions. They are high in motivation and procrastinate less. The present study is an attempt to explore the relationship between procrastination and self-esteem among students.

Research findings from present study will help in identifying whether procrastination and self-esteem are related as far as student population is concerned. Once a relationship is highlighted, our research can lay grounds for designing psychological intervention strategies which can facilitate in raising self-esteem. Raising students' self-esteem can act as a cure for their habit of procrastination. Proper and timely intervention to enhance self-esteem can ultimately lead to better academic outcomes for students; that can be beneficial for laying grounds for a more productive future.

Research Hypotheses

- There is significant association between procrastination and self-esteem in university students.
- There will be gender difference in level of procrastination among university students.
- There will be gender difference in self-esteem among university students.
- There will be difference in procrastination across birth order in university students.
- There will be difference in self-esteem across birth order in university students.

Method

Research design

The current research investigated the relationship between procrastination and self-esteem among university students. Correlational research design was used to identify the relationship between procrastination and self-esteem.

Sample

Multistage sampling was employed in this research, randomly name of four universities were selected amongst the list of public and private sector universities in Lahore. Three departments among these four universities were randomly selected later on.

A total of 80 students (39 males and 41 females) enrolled in bachelors and masters program between the ages of 18 to 25 years were recruited from these three departments.

Tools / Instruments for data collection

1. *General Procrastination scale*: Procrastination was assessed as the score on the measure of Procrastination scale authored by (Lay, 1986). It is self-reported five point Likert scale (Extremely uncharacteristic= 1, moderately uncharacteristic= 2, Neutral=3, Moderately uncharacteristic =4 and Extremely uncharacteristic= 5). It comprises of 20 statements. 10 items are reversed-keyed items: (3, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, 18, and 20). Total score on this measure ranges between 20-100. The scale had high reliability. Cronbach's alpha for the local study sample was reported to be $\alpha .85$. Score was computed by summing the ratings allocated to all the items, after reverse coding of the 10 items that were positively worded. Higher score revealed greater use of procrastination by the students.

2. *Rosenberg Self-esteem scale*: Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) was used to assess self-esteem. It comprises of 10 statements. Research participants responded to all 10 statements on a Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Scores for items 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7 were computed by assigning 3 to strongly agree category, 2 to agree, 1 to disagree and 0 to strongly disagree. For Items 3, 5, 8, 9, and 10 are reversely scored (Cronbach's alpha reliability of $\alpha .80$ was found for the indigenous sample).

Procedure

Permission letters to conduct this research were sought from the universities. Later, authority letters were presented to chairpersons / directors of the departments from these universities for formal consent to initiate data collection. Written consent was taken from each and every participant who volunteered to participate in this study. Confidentiality procedures were explained verbally to the participants as well as mentioned in the consent form. Purpose of the research was clearly spelled out in the written consent form. Demographic form was constructed to collect demographic information from these participants regarding their age, gender, birth order, department and students' academic status. After filling in the demographic information were asked to complete the General Procrastination Scale and Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale. English versions of both these scales were used. Later both of these questionnaires were quantitatively configured and scores were obtained. Results were generated through the application of SPSS (version 17).

A sample of 80 government and private university students was Table 1.

Descriptive characteristics of the Study Sample. (N=80)

Demographic		
Variables	f	%
Gender		
Male	39	48.8%
Female	41	51.3%
Education level		
Bachelors	42	52.5%
Masters	38	47.5%
Birth order		
First born	22	27.5%
Middle born	44	55.0%
Last born	12	15.0%
Only child	2	2.5%
Mean Age range in years= 21		
Region		
Lahore	71	88.8%
Out of Lahore	9	11.3%
Family system		
Joint	33	41.3%
Nuclear	47	51.8%

Note. Percentage = %

Table 2.

Relationship between Procrastination and Self-Esteem.

Variable	N	r	p
Procrastination	80	-.35	.001
Self-Esteem			

** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).

taken for this research project. The demographic characteristics of the sample are given in Table 1. Descriptive statistics were calculated.

Pearson correlation addressed the relationship between procrastination ($M = 58.6, SD = 10.1$) and self-esteem score ($M = 26.1, SD = 6.97$). For an alpha level of .01, the correlation between self-esteem and procrastination was found to be statistically significant, $r = -.35, p < .01$.

Discussion

The main objective of this study was to explore association between procrastination and self-esteem in students studying in universities. Statistically significant negative correlation was found between procrastination and self-esteem. Researches done previously by different group of researchers (Ferrari, 1991; Ferrari, 1994; Harrington, 2005; Lay, 1986; Lay, 1987; Beswick, Solomon and Mann, 1988; Steel, 2007) have also found comparable results.

The study revealed no difference between male and female students on procrastination. Though the difference was not statistically significant, but procrastination did exist in both groups. These research findings are consistent with that of Effert and Ferrari (1989). These researchers were also unable to find significant gender differences on procrastination.

esteem was found. This research finding is consistent with that of Maria and Yolanda (2003). These researchers examined the relationship of self-esteem with regard to gender and age for 660 Spanish students. Results endorsed no significant gender differences in general self-esteem.

Moreover our study findings highlight that difference on procrastination for first, second, middle born and the only child were statistically non-significant. These findings are consistent with that of Adams (1998). He designed a study to infer if there was significant difference between the birth order and the level of procrastination, and found no difference in level of procrastination across birth order.

Results of the study also failed to reach statistical significance for self-esteem and birth order, revealing that there is no difference in self-esteem across birth order. These research findings are consistent with that of research conducted by David and Estela (1980); these researchers also failed to find any difference in self-esteem and position one is born with.

So it can be concluded that students with high self-esteem procrastinate less where as those who procrastinate more have comparatively lower self-esteem. Procrastination and self-esteem do not differ for male and female university students. Furthermore, the present study points that procrastination and self-esteem remain same and is not difference across birth order, meaning that first born, middle born, last born and only child do not differ with regard to self-esteem and procrastination.

Limitations

The present study has a small sample size hence limited generalizability and in order that more valid and reliable conclusion could be drawn, the study needs to be replicated with a larger sample size.

It would be better to include other variables like anxiety, self-efficacy, perfectionism and depression to know about their correlates of procrastination.

A number of implications have emerged from the results of the present study. Due to procrastination, students lose their precious time as well as quality of work. It can lower their self-esteem, as they start feeling bad at the end of the day when they fail to do anything productive. Research results point in the direction of therapeutic intervention for students who procrastinate. Suggestions can be given for enhancement of self-esteem. Improving self-esteem is a better way to cure procrastination in students. Self-appraisal and self-worth leads students to do their tasks scrupulously and make important decisions on time. Timely intervention can help students improve their skills like time management and study habits.

Psychological interventions designed for enhancement of self-esteem and time management need to be incorporated within the academic structure of colleges and universities. Student counseling and assessment centers should be set up in the universities for timely help of students who have low self-esteem or for those in the habit of procrastination.

References

Adams, L. (1998). *The Effects of Birth order on Procrastination*. Retrieved

- from <http://clearinghouse.missouriwestern.edu/manuscripts/14.asp>
- Baumeister, R.F. (1999). *The Self in Social Psychology*. Philadelphia, USA: Edwards Brother, Ann Arbor.
- Bender, S.L. (2006). *Procrastination can be good for us*. Retrieved
- Beswick, G., Rothblum, E. D., & Mann, L. (1988). Psychological antecedents of student Procrastination. *Australian Psychologist*, 23, 207–217.
- Burka, J. B., & Yuen, L. M. (1982). Mind games procrastinators play. *Psychologist Journal*, 7, 32-34.
- Burka, J. B., & Yuen, L. M. (1983). *Procrastination: Why you do it, what to do about it*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- David, W., & Estela, A. (1980). Birth Order, Family Size, and Self-Esteem: A Filipino Study. *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 137, 297-98.
- Effert, B. R., & Ferrari, J. R. (1989). Decisional procrastination: Examining personality Correlation. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 4, 151-156.
- Ferrari, J. R. (1991). Self-handicapping by procrastinators: Protecting self-esteem, Social-esteem, or both. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 25, 245-261.
- Ferrari, J. R. (1994). Dysfunctional procrastination and its relationship with self-esteem, Interpersonal dependency and self-defeating behaviors. *Journal of Personality and Individual Differences*, 17, 673-679.
- Ferrari, J.R., & Emmons, R.A. (1995). Methods of procrastination and their relation To self-control and self-reinforcement: An exploratory study. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 10, 135-142.
- from <http://www.sharonbender.com/procrastination.html>
- Harrington, N (2005). It's too difficult! Frustration intolerance beliefs and procrastination. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 39, 873-883.
- HOBBS, J. (2008). *What Are The Major Disadvantages of Procrastination?* Retrieved from <http://ezinearticles.com/?What-Are-The-Major-Disadvantages-of-Procrastination?&id=1087177>
- Hoover, E. (2005). *The chronicle of higher education: Tomorrow, I Love Ya!* Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/free/v52/i16/16a03001.htm>
- Lay, C. H. (1986). At last, my research article on procrastination. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 20, 474-495.
- Lay, C. H. (1987). A modal profile analysis of procrastinators: A search for types. *Journal of Personality and Individual Differences*, 8, 705-714.
- Maria, L.F., & Yolanda, R.C. (2003). Age and sex differences in self-esteem among Spanish adolescents. *Psychological reports*, 93, 876-878.
- Steel, P. (January 01, 2007). The nature of procrastination: a meta-analytic and theoretical review of quintessential self-regulatory failure. *Psychological Bulletin*, 133, 1, 65-94.
- Steel, Piers. (2007). *The nature of procrastination*. American Psychological Association (APA).
- Yaakub, F. N. (2000). *Procrastination among Students in Institutes of Higher Learning: Challenges for K-Economy*.

Received January, 2009

Revision Received May, 2012