

Understanding and Managing Perfectionism: A Case Study of a 19-Year-Old Female

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ABSTRACT

This case study explores the treatment of perfectionism in a 19-year-old female, Ismat Fatima, who presents with symptoms of anxiety, self-criticism, and obsessive tendencies related to high personal standards. Assessments using the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) and the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-5 (SCID-5) revealed high levels of self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism, along with a diagnosis of Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) and Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder (OCPD). The Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS), a 35-question self-report measure, was used to assess perfectionism across four subscales: concern over mistakes and doubts about actions, excessive concern with parental expectations and evaluations, and concern with precision, order, and organization.

Keywords: Perfectionism, FMPS, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Personal Standards

INTRODUCTION

Perfectionism is a multidimensional personality trait characterized by striving for flawlessness, excessively high standards, and critical evaluations of oneself and others (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990; Stoeber, 2017). It is often driven by internal pressures, such as the desire to avoid failure or harsh judgment. While perfectionism is not classified as a mental disorder, it significantly increases the risk of developing anxiety, depression, and obsessive-compulsive tendencies.

Perfectionism manifests itself in three domains:

- Self-oriented perfectionism: Imposing unrealistic standards on oneself.
- Other-oriented perfectionism: Expecting unrealistic standards from others.
- Socially-prescribed perfectionism: Perceiving unrealistic expectations of perfection from others.

Common indicators of perfectionism include:

- Feeling like a failure despite achievements.
- Procrastination due to fear of imperfection.
- Inability to relax or express emotions freely.
- Controlling behavior in personal and professional relationships.
- Obsession with rules, lists, and organization.

Mental Health Correlates of Perfectionism

Perfectionism is linked to various mental health conditions, including:

- Anxiety and Depression: Perfectionists are more likely to experience generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) and major depressive disorder (MDD) due to chronic self-criticism and fear of failure (Egan, Wade, & Shafran, 2011).
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD): Perfectionism plays a crucial role in the development of OCD, particularly in individuals with intrusive thoughts and compulsions related to order and correctness (Frost & Steketee, 1997).
- Eating Disorders: Studies have established a strong link between perfectionism and eating disorders like anorexia nervosa (AN) and bulimia nervosa (BN), where individuals attempt to achieve unrealistic body standards (Hewitt, Flett, & Ediger, 1995).

CASE PRESENTATION

Background Information

Ismat Fatima, a 19-year-old first-year BA Psychology student at The Bhopal School of Social Sciences, exhibits significant distress due to her perfectionist tendencies. Despite excelling academically, she experiences chronic dissatisfaction and anxiety about not being "good enough."

Symptoms and Behavioral Patterns

- Struggles with persistent self-doubt and the need for perfection in every task.
- Expects her friends to meet unrealistic standards of perfection.
- Displays anger issues when faced with failure or imperfection.
- Engages in excessive revisions of work until satisfied.
- Avoids tasks if they cannot be completed perfectly.
- Associates perfectionism with admiration and social validation.
- Reacts negatively to criticism and engages in counterarguments.
- Procrastinates due to fear of imperfection.
- Reports obsessive tendencies and anxiety related to perfectionism.

Assessment and Diagnosis

To confirm the presence of perfectionism-related symptoms, the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS) was administered. The results indicated significant levels of self-oriented perfectionism and obsessive-compulsive tendencies, supporting the presence of perfectionism and possible Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD).

TOOL PRESENTATION

The Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS), developed by Frost et al. (1990), is a 35-item self-report measure designed to assess perfectionism in young adults. It evaluates six subscales:

1. Concern over Mistakes: Anxiety over errors, associating mistakes with personal failure.

2. Doubts about Actions: Persistent uncertainty regarding task completion.
3. Parental Expectations: Internalized high expectations from parents.
4. Parental Criticism: Fear of parental disapproval and criticism.
5. Personal Standards: Excessive importance placed on high standards.
6. Organization: Strong preference for order and structure.

Additional assessments included:

- Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-5 (SCID-5): Identified features of anxiety and obsessive-compulsive personality traits.
- Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS): Indicated high levels of self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism.
- Self-reported Diaries: Reflected persistent self-criticism and avoidance of tasks due to fear of failure.

PROCEDURE

1. The subject was seated in a comfortable environment.
2. Rapport was established to encourage open communication.
3. Instructions were provided, and the subject was asked to complete demographic details without stress.
4. The FMPS questionnaire was administered, with a completion time of 10–15 minutes.
5. The subject was assessed in a calm and controlled setting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although perfectionism can drive success, excessive perfectionism can negatively impact mental health. The following strategies may help mitigate its adverse effects:

- Setting Realistic Goals: Breaking large goals into smaller, manageable tasks.

- Exploring New Activities: Engaging in hobbies that embrace imperfection.
- Practicing Mindfulness: Reducing anxious thoughts through meditation and mindfulness techniques.
- Adopting a Growth Mindset: Viewing challenges as opportunities for personal development.
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): Addressing perfectionist thinking patterns with professional intervention.

RESULTS

The subject exhibited high scores across all subscales of the FMPS, confirming significant perfectionist tendencies. Clinical assessments further indicated a correlation with anxiety and obsessive-compulsive traits.

CONCLUSIONS

Perfectionism is a multidimensional trait associated with self-criticism, fear of failure, and unattainable goal-setting. Although it is not classified as a mental disorder, perfectionism significantly increases vulnerability to anxiety, OCD, and depression. Overcoming perfectionism involves cultivating self-acceptance, resilience, and a balanced approach to achievement. Cognitive-behavioral interventions can help individuals develop healthier perspectives on success and self-worth.

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