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## Comparison between Perfectionism and Social Support Dimensions and Academic Burnout in Students

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### Abstract

Introduction this study aims to compare the dimensions of perfectionism and social support in students in study year 2010. Method: Through cluster sampling of the 8 eight faculties of Allameh Tabatabai University three colleges and 300 students (male-female) were randomly selected. The subjects completed the questionnaires of perfectionism dimensions (identity and Felt, 1991); social support (Wax, Phillips, Holly, Thompson, Williams and Stewart, 1986) and Bersu academic burnout (1997). The data were analyzed using independent t statistics. Results: The results showed that social support is high in students with low academic burnout than students with high burnout. Conclusions: perfectionism is high in students with low academic burnout than students with high academic burnout.

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*Keywords*: : perfectionism, social support, academic burnout.

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### 1. Introduction

Stress is inevitable in a person's life. However, interpretations are somewhat different and vague and everyone will experience it in his different behavioural moods and it should be considered as consequence of interaction with environment for achieving balance. Many studies carried out over the years have demonstrated that stressful events

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are effective in the onset of mental and physical disorders (Kobasa, 1988). Today, most researchers confirm the role of stressors factors in frequent and prolonged physiological arousal that leads to recurrent or illness. Long-term stress can have physical and psychological problems that fatigue is one of the most important consequences. Dick (1992) believes that when a person is exposed to long and persistent environmental stress and mental pressure if he could not adapt to it he will suffer from burnout. Generally speaking, burnout can be called disorder due to a prolonged exposure to environmental stress and appearing physical, emotional symptoms and mental problems dimensions. (Saatchi, 1998). Schaufeli et al (1974) argue that the burnout syndrome is not a mental disorder, but it spreads slowly over time and it may be turned into a mental disability. The concept of burnout was introduced as the first time by Fredenberger in early seventieth and its emergence and growth owe Fredenberger New York and Maslach in California. Burnout was considered in the professional interactions of individuals such as social service workers, with emphasis on the interpersonal relationships between applicant and supplier at first (Maslach, 2001; Fredenberger, 1974). According to Maslach and Jackson (1981) "burnout syndrome consists of emotional fatigue, depersonalization and reduction of individuality of person". A key aspect of burnout syndrome is increased emotional fatigue. Also researchers observed burnout symptoms in contexts like marriage sports and academic study (Nunes, 2003; Schaufeli, Martinez and Bakker, 2002). Some evidence supports the presence of burnout among students (Meier & Schmeck, 1985). Academic burnout in students is result of fatigue due to demands and studies necessities, pessimistic feeling and lack of eagerness toward tasks and feeling incompetency (Schaufeli and et al 2002 quoted by Jean and Chan, 2007). Pines and his colleagues (1981) investigated burnout among nurses, counselors, coaches, students and they found that students are in high levels of burnout scale. These findings show that students experience so much burnout during their academic studies. Different factors could lead to burnout and there are different ways to prevent and treatment of this disorder. Sarason (1988) believes that there are factors that can modulate the relationship between stress and illness and can exacerbate at the same time. In stressful situations some factors appear in the role of confounding variables. These factors include: 1- personality 2- coping skills and past experience 3- social support. Social support is one of the most important environmental factors in clarifying the phenomenon of burnout (Jackson, 1986). There is strong evidence of a negative relationship between burnout and social support (Beck, 1987; Watkins, 1983). Social support is defined as a resource that will enable individuals to cope with stress (House, 1981; Russel, Vanvelzen and Altmaier, 1987, Chang et al, 2005; Hurr et al, 2007). When social relationships are gone people show negative emotion associated with burnout (Maslach and Litter, 1997). Guplerud (1980) emphasizes that social support is important intimidator variable in evaluation of stressful events experienced during studies and emotional and physical problems. Researchers consider social support as a protective barrier against perceived stress (Bates & Toro, 1999, Cohen and Wills, 1985). Researches show that social support plays moderating role on stress. Luo (1997) believes that social support moderates the effects of stressful events and leads to more positive emotions (Lu, 1997). Furthermore, social support plays an important role in maintaining health and protection from the harmful effects of stressful events. Research is also carried out for identification of personality factors predicting mental pressure and burnout (Cano- Garcia, 2005). Perfectionism is a personality characteristic associated with stress, conflict and burnout and plays an important role in creating pressure and burnout (Friedman, 2000 Felt, identities, and Hewitt & Hallaett, 1995). In recent years perfectionism in literature review could have gained attention of researches (Hill & Teri, 2007, Clark and Coker, 2009). A number of researchers define perfectionism with two dimensions (normal) and uncompromised (abnormal) (Wong, AEslan and Rice, 2007). But Flett (1991) distinguishes three dimensions of perfectionism: self-oriented perfectionism, which includes individuals strive to achieve complete continence with high unrealistic standards. Others oriented perfectionism: its focus is on individual behavior and the behavior of others should be completely free from any inaccuracies. Community-oriented perfectionism: where one believes that others (family and community) have considered extreme standards and expectations for him and he has to meet these expectations. Studies suggest a relationship between perfectionism (especially negative) and psychological injuries (Conor, 2003; Hewitte et al, 2003). In general according to studies in this scope it can be comprehend the importance of internal and external factors on mental health. The aim of this study is to investigate differences between self-oriented perfectionism and social support received by others in individuals with high and low burnout. The researcher seeks to achieve the effectiveness of different aspects of perfectionism and social support on individuals with high burnout.

## 2. Research

### 2.1 Hypotheses

1 - Social support is high in students with low academic burnout compared to students with high academic burnout.

2 – Perfectionism is high in students with lower academic achievement compared to students with high academic burnout.

## 3. Materials and Methods

### 3.1. Population, sample and sampling

The statistical population of this research is all MA and BA students (female-male) at Allameh Tabatabai University studying in the study year of 2011-2012. A sample in the study was 300 students selected as sampling clusters. For doing so, cluster sampling was carried out as single stage at first among eight faculties of Allameh Tabatabai university and 3 faculties were selected including: faculties of Psychology and education, law, political science and literature and foreign language and then 300 students (girls - boys) were randomly selected. It should be noted that the ratio of students (girls - boys) was taken to determine the proportion of students in the sample. This ratio was 65 to 35 (female - male) among BA students and equal ratio was confidentiality for MA students in both groups. In order to collect data the students agreed to participate in the study at first then the the research objectives and advantages and how to complete the questionnaires were explained. Confidentiality of their information was assured and finally the questionnaires were distributed among students. After entering the data in SPSS software the individuals were divided into two groups according to the scores of low and high burnout.

### 3.2. Instruments

#### 3.2.1 Academic Burnout Questionnaire

This questionnaire was prepared by Berso and et al (1997). This questionnaire measures three areas of academic burnout or academic fatigue, apathy to studies and academic incompetency. This questionnaire has 15 statements graded by Likert five scale of completely disagree and completely agree. Distribution of statements is as follows: Academic fatigue 5 items (all lessons are boring), academic apathy in 4 items (I feel I am not interested in lessons) and academic inefficiency by 6 items (I feel I cannot cope with course problems). The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated 0.70, 0.82 and 0.75 for three academic burnout scopes. Validity was calculated by confirmatory factorial analysis. The researchers calculated that confirmation fitness index, increase fitness index and root mean square error of approximation index are optimal. Neami (2009) calculated the reliability of the questionnaire 0.79 for the academic fatigue and 0.82 for academic apathy and 0.75 for academic incompetency. In this study, the total scores were used to calculate the individuals' burnout score. Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.90 for academic burnout in this study.

#### 3.2.2 Social support test

This questionnaire was designed by Waxen, Phillips, Thompson, Williams and Stewart in 1986, based on the definition of social protection by Cobe. This scale has 23 statements consisting of three domains of family, friends and others. Family and friends subscales contain 8 items and others subscale is comprised of seven items. This test is based on a 4-grades scale (highly agree, agree, disagree and extremely disagree) (Lutfi, 1994). He calculated internal and external reliability coefficients as 0.90 and 0.70 for students' internal reliability and 0.81 for external reliability by test on a group of 100 people from students and two groups consisting of 200 and 50 students. Ebrahimgavam (1992) in his study concluded that the obtained coefficients indicate the degree of

accuracy, stability and reproducibility and predictability. Therefore, this test can be used in the same subjects. Khabaz and et al (2011) calculated alpha coefficient 0.74 for the questionnaire in teenagers group. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.66 for social support questionnaire.

3.2.3 Multi perfectionism scale – in this research the subjects perfectionism dimensions were measured by MPS. This scale was prepared by Hewitt and Flett(1991) and it was normalized by Besharat in Iran(2003) and it contains 30 questions that its first ten questions measure self-centered perfectionism and other ten questions measure other oriented perfectionism and final ten questions measures community oriented perfectionism in Likert five scales. In measuring primary validity Iranian scale form on a sample of 180 students from different faculties of Tehran University, Cronbach's alpha obtained 0.90 for self-oriented perfectionism , 0.83 for other oriented perfectionism and 0.78 for community oriented perfectionism that indicates high internal consistency of the scale .Correlation coefficients among the 40 students from two times with four weeks distance were to the distance 0.84 for self-centered perfectionism, 0.82 for others oriented perfectionism and -.80 for community-oriented perfectionism that indicates high reliability of this test in Iran. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.89 for the perfectionism dimensions scale.

#### 4. Results

H1: Social support is high for students with low academic burnout than students with high academic burnout.

T-test results show that the t value obtained from a table of critical t is higher at  $\alpha = 0.01$  and degrees of freedom 160 ( $t = 2.58$ ) and therefore the null hypothesis is rejected based on " there is no significant difference between two groups of students with high and low academic burnout in social support scores" and according to low scores of students with high academic burnout in social support scores by confidence level of %99 it can be concluded that the students with low academic burnout have high social support so the first hypothesis is accepted.

Table 1: Results of t-test to compare average social support in both lower and higher academic burnout

Variables	Groups	Mean	t	df	Sig
Social support	High academic burnout	14/7	4/3	160	0/0001
	Low academic burnout	15/99			

Hypothesis 2: perfectionism in students with low academic burnout is higher than students with high academic burnout.

As the data in Table 2 shows t value obtained from the t-critical perfectionism score table is higher in  $\alpha = 0.01$  and degrees of freedom, 160 ( $t = 2.58$ ) and therefore the null hypothesis of " there is no significant difference between two groups of students with high and low academic burnout in academic perfectionism scores" is rejected and according to the high mean score of students with low academic burnout in perfectionism with 99% confidence level it can be said that students with low academic burnout significantly have more perfectionism compared to students with high academic burnout . The second hypothesis is also confirmed. T test results are shown to compare the perfectionism subscales. T values obtained in self-oriented perfectionism is significant in significant level of at  $p < 0.05$  and community oriented perfectionism in  $p < 0.01$  is significant and therefore it can concluded that the students with low academic burnout have self-centred and community oriented perfectionism significantly compared to students with high academic .However, the value obtained from the t test was not significant based on the other measures of perfectionism and so the null hypothesis is confirmed in this subscale for students and it can be said that there is no difference between scores of students with high and low academic burnout in subscale of other oriented perfectionism.

Table 2: Results of t-test to compare average perfectionism subscales in two groups of high and low academic burnout students

Variables	Groups	Mean	T	df	Sig
Self-centered perfectionism	High academic burnout	28/58	0/98	160	0/049
	Low academic burnout	30/67	1		
Other oriented perfectionism	High academic burnout	28/15	0/31	160	0/193
	Low academic burnout	29/32	1		
Community-oriented perfectionism	high academic burnout	29/63	0/59	160	0/0001
	Low academic burnout	33/60	3		
total score of perfectionism	high academic burnout	86/36	0/83	160	0/005
	Low academic burnout	93/59	2		

## 5. Conclusion

First hypothesis: Social support is high for students with low academic burnout than students with high academic burnout.

Data analysis showed that social support is for students with low academic burnout than students with high academic burnout. So this hypothesis was confirmed. This finding is consistent with the findings Yildirim (2008) and Young (2005).Guplerud confirms that social support acts like as intimidator variable in assessment of stressful events and experienced physical and emotional problems. Sources of support cause that the student feel being cared and interested, self-esteem and being valued as significant part of communication(Alipour 1994) and this being valued and self-esteem increase academic performance and reduce academic burnout. One of the reasons for low academic burnout in students with high social support is that having high self-esteem and sense of control reduces the sources of stress and increases coping with stressful events and prevent negative events and individuals could to deal effectively with stressful events (House 1981; quoted by Victor quoting 1988:26). Since high self-esteem is related with academic achievement and performance (Ulrich et al, 2006; Ross and et al, 2000; Trembli, Inman, Williams, 2000) so that it can be expected that students with more social support from their family has low academic burnout due to higher self-esteem.

Second hypothesis: perfectionism is high in students with low academic burnout than students with high academic burnout.

The results of this hypothesis were confirmed. Perfectionism is high in students with low academic burnout than students with high academic burnout. This finding is consistent with the results of Zhang and Chan (2007), Stabber and Rambo (2007), Nancy and Lewis (1997) and Parker (1996). However, results of studies between positive and negative perfectionism were distinguish normal and abnormal or anomalous and they showed a negative correlation between negative perfectionism with academic performance (Edward Banks and Hudson, 2004; Short and et al, 1995; Inez et al, 2001). High perfectionism in school students with low academic burnout show that that these students may have normal perfectionism and they do not have obstacle for academic achievement and overcome difficulties and pressures of academic studies and it has led to reduction of academic burnout and achievement. According to the results of this study it can be said that increase of social support from family members, universities authorities and also increase of perfectionism could prevent academic burnout.

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