



The Impact of Maladaptive Perfectionism and Parental Expectation on Self-Critical Rumination Among Young Adults

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received:	May	16, 2025
Revised:	June	06, 2025
Accepted:	June	12, 2025
Available Online:	June	20, 2025

Keywords:

maladaptive perfectionism, parental expectation, self-critical rumination, young adults.

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This present study aims to explore the impact of maladaptive perfection and parental expectations on self-critical rumination among young adults Pakistan. It is hypothesized that there will be a significant relationship between maladaptive perfectionism, parental expectation and self-critical rumination among young adults.

Design: A sample N=200 participants was taken from young adults age of 18-30 of Lahore, Pakistan. This study was conducted on both male and female participants. According to the study around 50.5% female and 49.5% were male. The assessment tool employed in the study include Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS), the Parental Expectation Scale, and Self-Critical Rumination Scale (SCRS).

Methodology/approach: Data analysis involve Pearson's correlation revealed positive between maladaptive perfectionism, parental expectation and self-critical rumination. Multiple linear regression analysis shows that both maladaptive perfectionism and parental expectation significant predict self-critical rumination. Internal consistency of scales was checked by seeing the Cronbach's alpha value of three scales.

Findings: results showed that there is likely to be a significant positive relationship between maladaptive perfectionism, parental expectations and self-critical rumination. Further-more self-critical rumination positively predictor of maladaptive perfectionism and parental expectation among young adults.

Introduction

Maladaptive rumination, defined as self-critical thinking, often stems from inflated personal failure and inadequacy. Rather than facilitating growth, this kind of rumination reinforces shame and low self-worth (Flett et al., 2016; Zuroff et al., 2005). It is rooted in cognitive schemas, affecting mental health and interpersonal functioning.

Maladaptive perfectionism—characterized by relentless self-criticism and fear of failure—is widespread among youth, especially where parental expectations shape one’s sense of self. This perfectionism correlates with anxiety, depression, and burnout (Flett et al., 2022). These issues are intensified in collectivist societies, where family success is emphasized over individual achievement.

Perfectionism has been defined as the relentless pursuit of excellence (Flett & Hewitt, 2002) and studied across dimensions: adaptive vs. maladaptive (Slaney et al., 2001), or multidimensional (Frost et al., 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Frost’s model includes concerns about mistakes and parental criticism, while Hewitt and Flett’s HF-MPS distinguishes self-, socially prescribed-, and other-oriented perfectionism.

Studies show maladaptive perfectionism is often measured through subscales like Concern over Mistakes (F-MPS) and Socially Prescribed Perfectionism (HF-MPS), strongly linked to psychological distress (Enns & Cox, 2002). However, inconsistent measures across studies limit comparability (Rice & Ashby, 2007).

Perfectionism’s origins lie in parental influence, temperament, and early relational experiences (Flett et al., 2002). High parental disapproval predicts maladaptive perfectionism (Rice et al., 2005). It is linked to distress in children and adolescents, including disordered eating, depression, and suicidal ideation (Rooney & Kane, 2008; Stornelli et al., 2009).

Maladaptive perfectionism also contributes to exhaustion, poor health behaviors, low self-confidence, and social difficulties (Rice & Dellwo, 2002; Dittner et al., 2011). Parental expectations can be either motivating or psychologically harmful, depending on realism, flexibility, and cultural context (Francis et al., 2020).

Culturally, collectivist societies like Pakistan tie academic success to family honor, increasing pressure. In contrast, individualistic societies emphasize personal achievement. SES also influences expectations; high SES parents may exert greater pressure due to access to resources, while low SES families still often maintain high aspirations for upward mobility (Sirin, 2005).

Parental expectations strongly predict academic success (Fan & Chen, 2001). However, the perception of these expectations—how children internalize them—matters more than the expectations themselves (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Emerging adults are especially vulnerable as they seek independence and form identity (Arnett, 2007).

Self-critical rumination (SCR) arises from perceived failure and is a maladaptive coping style that perpetuates distress (Moreira & Canavarro, 2018). SCR predicts depression, anxiety, and low self-worth (Joormann et al., 2006; Aldao et al., 2010). It is distinct from automatic negative thoughts due to its chronic and rigid nature (Dunkley et al., 2006).

Early life experiences, such as conditional love or harsh parenting, contribute to SCR (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010). Traits like neuroticism and low self-compassion worsen SCR, while compassion can buffer its impact (Neff, 2003). Gender and culture also affect rumination tendencies—women and collectivist cultures report higher SCR (Heine et al., 2001; Nolen & Jackson, 2001).

Literature Review / Background

Self-critical rumination refers to repetitive thinking centered on self-critical views. While both rumination and self-criticism negatively impact parenting and psychological functioning, their direct role in parenting outcomes is underexplored. Maladaptive perfectionism, marked by self-critical standards and fear of mistakes, is linked to poor mental health outcomes in youth, especially with increased depression and anxiety (Limburg et al., 2017; WHO, 2023). Parental expectations and control are significant contributors (Flett & Hewitt, 2002).

Perfectionism comprises both maladaptive (self-evaluative) and adaptive (conscientious) traits (Hill et al., 2004). Maladaptive perfectionism is associated with negative emotional beliefs, suppression of feelings, and psychological distress (Spokas et al., 2009). Argus and Thompson (2008) found that attention mediates the link between maladaptive perfectionism and depression, while Short and Mazmanian (2013) revealed that mindfulness buffers against rumination's effects.

Rumination mediates the connection between perfectionism and self-forgiveness (Dixon et al., 2014), and self-critical rumination negatively correlates with perfectionism and self-esteem (Fearn et al., 2022). Adollaho (2019) and Dunkley et al. (2006) found that rumination links perfectionism and social anxiety. Zuroff et al. (2004) reported consistent patterns of rumination and negative affect in perfectionists.

Parental expectations also correlate with self-critical rumination in children (Moreria & Canavarro, 2018). Maladaptive perfectionism stems from early inconsistent parental feedback and conditional approval, contributing to neurotic traits (Hamachek, 1978; Malivoire et al., 2019). In contrast, adaptive perfectionists receive consistent validation and set realistic goals.

The Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (Frost et al., 1990) includes elements like concern over mistakes and high parental expectations, revealing that critical parental environments shape perfectionist tendencies. Maladaptive perfectionists are often paralyzed by fear of failure, leading to procrastination and cognitive inflexibility (Flett & Hewitt, 2020).

Cultural dimensions play a role: collectivist societies foster interdependent self-concepts shaped by familial expectations, while individualistic cultures emphasize autonomy (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Suh & Flores, 2023). Kwon et al. (2013) noted that cultural context shapes the content of rumination.

Theoretical integration of Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987) and CBT suggests that mismatch between self and parental standards generates psychological strain. Self-critical rumination is linked with perfectionistic schemas, negative reinforcement, and interpersonal dysfunction (Flett et al., 2018; Stoeber & Damian, 2020).

Soenens et al. (2019) found that conditional regard and psychological control predicted perfectionism and rumination. Self-critical rumination mediates distress in perfectionists by reinforcing self-attacking thoughts and ideal self-discrepancy (Dunkley et al., 2017; Zuo et al.,

2022; Ferrari et al., 2018; Sherry et al., 2019). Cultural pressures exacerbate this cycle (Ng & Wang, 2019; Zhang & Zhang, 2021; Li & Wang, 2019).

Neurobiological studies show rumination involves DMN hyperactivation and DLPFC dysfunction, with perfectionists showing greater emotional reactivity (Luyten et al., 2020; Trompetter et al., 2017). Social media comparison increases perfectionism and self-criticism (Baldwin & Dandeneau, 2019). Gender also influences expression—women internalize symptoms more (Hill & Curran, 2017).

Pandemic-related academic stress elevated perfectionism and rumination among university students (Kemp & Hu, 2023; Zhao et al., 2023). Family-based perfectionism is passed intergenerationally (Li, Huang, & Cheung, 2023). Academic burnout correlates with socially prescribed perfectionism and rumination, especially in high-pressure courses.

Digital interventions (e.g., CBT apps) have limited success without accounting for attachment issues and personalization (Roberts et al., 2022). Compassion training can reduce perfectionism and rumination (Neff & McGehee, 2018). Parental involvement and psychoeducation are crucial (Choy & Cheung, 2021).

Most research uses cross-sectional methods with Western samples, limiting cultural insights (Kim et al., 2020). Future studies should include longitudinal and culturally sensitive models that explore intersecting variables such as trauma, emotion regulation, and attachment insecurity. Systemic inequalities also shape perfectionism in marginalized groups, where identity-contingent perfectionism arises from stereotype threats (Ahmed & Johnson, 2024).

Hypotheses

- It is hypothesized that there would be a significant positive relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and self-critical rumination among young adults
- It is hypothesized that there would be a positive relationship between parental expectation and self-critical rumination among young adults.
- It is hypothesized that parental expectation would be predictors between maladaptive perfectionism and self-critical rumination in young adults.
- It is hypothesized that there would be no significant relationship between maladaptive perfectionism, parental expectations, and self-critical rumination in young adults.

Conceptual Framework

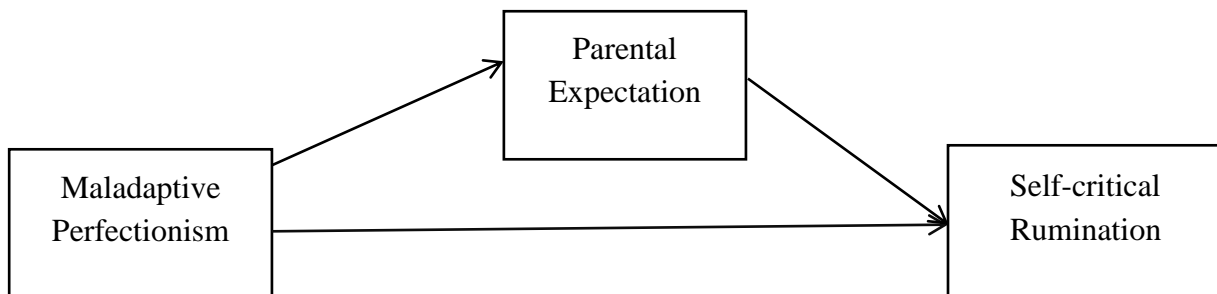


Figure 1: Showing mediation role of Parental Expectation in Maladaptive Perfectionism and Self-critical Rumination

Methodology

Research Strategy: A correlational research design was used to examine the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism, parental expectations and self-critical rumination in young adults.

Sampling strategy: A Purposive sampling strategy was used to select based on inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Participants: A sample was comprised of N=200 adults. In this research, the participants were male and female young adults aged 18-30 living in Lahore, Pakistan. The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to draw the sample.

Assessment tools

Frost Multi-dimensional perfectionism Scale (FMPS)

Maladaptive perfectionism will be operationally defined and measured using four subscales of the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS) developed by Frost et al. (1990). The FMPS is a 35-item self-report instrument designed to assess multiple dimensions of perfectionism. For the purposes of this research, the subscales of Concern Over Mistakes, Doubts About Actions, Parental Expectations, and Parental Criticism will be utilized, as they are empirically associated with the maladaptive aspects of perfectionism (Frost et al., 1990).

Parental Expectations Scale (PES)

Parental expectation will be assessed using a culturally adapted version of the parental expectation scale (originally developed by Wang & Heppner, (2002), which evaluate the degree to which individual perceive their parents as placing high and sometimes unrealistic demands on their academic personal success.

Self-critical Rumination Scale

Self-critical rumination scale will be measured using the Self-critical Rumination scales developed by Smart et al. (2016). This ten items scale captures the frequency of repetitive, negative self-focused thoughts related to personal failures and perceived inadequacies. Responses are given on the Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all like me) to 5 (very well like me)

Procedure

The research was continued after taking permission and approval from Superior University's Psychology Department. The research was conducted, and the data were collected through the questionnaire method from young adults age between 18-30. The data was collected by providing the online Google form on social media platforms and by visiting universities to fill up the questionnaires from young adults aged 18-30. Permission was taken from universities, and the purpose and nature of the study were explained to them and the participants. After permission, the scales were used. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study. Informed consent was given to them. The questionnaires only take 20-25 minutes to complete. Participants were allowed to volunteer throughout the study. Finally, the collected data were analyzed using SPSS 27th version, and findings were reported according to the ethical standards.

Results

Table 1: A descriptive and reliable analysis of the Frost multidimensional perfectionism Scale, PES, Parental Expectation Scale and Self-Critical Rumination Scale. (N=200)

Scales	K	M	SD	(α)	Range		Skewness	Kurtosis
					Actual	Observed		
FMPS	35	107.21	17.61	0.87	35- 175	54-165	.03	1.57
PES	20	53.21	16.99	0.86	20-100	9-95	.26	.63
SCRS	10	25.07	5.04	0.73	10- 40	10-37	-.21	.72

Note: M=mean, SD= standard deviation, FMPS= frost multidimensional perfectionism scale, PES= parental expectation scale, SCRS= self-critical rumination scale.

The values of Cronbach's alpha show the reliability of questionnaires. FMPS scale shows fair internal consistency as the values of Cronbach alpha was 0.87. PES scale reliability was also good as the value was 0.86 whereas Cronbach alpha value for SCRS was poor as the value was 0.73. The table suggest that values of skewness and kurtosis falls within the range which indicates that distributions are approximately normal. However, Q.Q plots are also normally distributed.

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of age (N = 200)

Variables	M	SD
Age	22.47	1.92

Note. M=Mean; SD=Standard Deviation

The result showed that mean age of participant is 22.57 which mean that most of the adult belong to age 22 with a standard deviation of 1.92.

Table 3: Frequencies and Percentages of Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Participants (N = 200)

Variables	F	%
Gender		
Men	99	49.5
Girls	101	50.5
Education		
Intermediate	20	10
Graduation	166	83
Post-graduation	14	7

Note. f=frequency; %=percentage

Table 3 show detailed description of categorical variables with the help of frequencies and percentages. The first categorical variable was gender which revealed that girls (99%) and boys (101%) were divided into two categories. Participant education variable also revealed that 10% having intermediate degree 83% were having graduation and 7% having post graduate degree.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient among maladaptive perfectionism, parental expectations and self-critical rumination in Young Adults (N=200)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1 Maladaptive Perfectionism	107.21	17.61		.50***	.45***
2 Parental Expectation	53.21	16.99			.38***
3 Self-critical Rumination	25.07	5.05			

Note: M = mean; SD= standard deviation; *p<.05 **p<.01. ***p<.001

The results indicate that maladaptive perfectionism has significantly positive correlation with parental expectations (r= .50, p<.001) suggesting that individual with higher level of perfectionism tend to perceive greater parental expectation. Maladaptive perfectionism was moderately correlated self-critical rumination (r=.45, p=<.001) indicate that higher perfectionism associated with self-critical thought. Parental expectation showed significant positive correlation with self-critical rumination (r=.38, p<.001).

Table 5: Multiple Linear Regression (Forced Enter Method) showing self-critical rumination as Predictors of maladaptive perfectionism and parental expectations of Young Adults (N=200)

Variables	B	95% CI		SE	B	R ²	ΔR ²
		LL	UL				
Constant	11.17***	7.35	14.99	1.94			
Maladaptive Per	.10***	.06	.14	.02	.34		
Parental Expectation	.06**	.02	.11	.02	.21		
						.24	.23***

Note: *p<.05 **p<.01. ***p<.001

Table shows the impact of maladaptive perfectionism and parental expectation on self-critical rumination among young adults. The R² value of .24 revealed that the predictor explained 24% variance in the outcome variables with F (2,197) = 30.33, P<.001. The finding reveals that maladaptive perfectionism positively predicted self-critical rumination (β = .34) p < .001 parental expectation also positive predicted self-critical rumination (β = .21) p <.01.

Table 6: Analysis of the Mediation between Maladaptive perfectionism, Parental Expectation and Self-critical Rumination in Adults

Antecedent	Consequences			Y(CF)	95% CI		
	B	SE	LL-UL		B	SE	LL-UL
MP(X)	.48***	.06	.36, .60	c'	.10***	.02	.06, .14
PE (M)				B	.06**	.02	.02, .11
Constant	1.76	6.46	-10.99, 14.50		11.17**	1.94	7.35, 14.99
Total effect	-.10	.02	.09, .16				
MP→ PE → SC	.03**	.02	.00, .06				
Sobel Z	2.77*						
	R ² =	.25**			R ² =	.24***	

Note *p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table 6 showed mediation analysis through Hayes PROCESS Macros using model 4 to find out whether parental expectation mediates the connection between maladaptive perfectionism and self-critical rumination. In path a R^2 value of .25 shown that predictors described 25% variance in the outcome with [$F(3,198) = 65.12, p < .01$]. The result revealed that parental expectation was positively associated with parental expectation ($b = .06, p < .001$) indicated that greater level of maladaptive perfectionism predicted higher levels of parental expectation. Furthermore, in path b R^2 value of .24 shown that predictors explicated 24% variance in the outcome with [$F(2,197) = 30.33, p < .001$]. Result showed that parental expectation was positively linked with self-critical rumination ($b = .06^{**}, p < .01$), indicating that greater level of parental expectation were linked with higher self-critical rumination. When controlling for parental expectation, the direct effect of maladaptive perfectionism on self-critical rumination also significant ($b = .10^{***}, p < .001$), representing partial mediation. The indirect effect of maladaptive perfectionism on self-critical rumination through parental expectation was also significant ($b = .03^{**}$). This finding revealed that maladaptive perfectionism impacts self-critical rumination indirectly by increasing parental expectation, which in turn, contributes to higher self-critical rumination.

Discussion

The study aimed to explore the impact of maladaptive perfectionism and parental expectations on self-critical rumination among young adults. The finding of the study provide insight into how personal and familiar factors that influence maladaptive perfectionism among young adults.

H1: There is likely to be a significant positive relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and self-critical rumination among young adults.

This hypothesis suggests that there is a positive relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and self-critical rumination. This was supported by moderate positive correlation ($r = .47, p < .001$), indicating that higher perfectionism is associated with greater tendencies to engaged in self-critical thoughts. These results linked with previous literature suggesting that maladaptive perfectionism promotes self-criticism, self-doubt and increase the susceptibility to cognitive distortions, such as self-blame and rumination (Dunkley et al., 2003).

Furthermore Adollaho (2019) conducted a study to find out the association between rumination and perfectionism to social anxiety. A cross-sectional study was accompanied among 450 Malaysian scholar students using self-report questionnaires. Result reveled that rumination mediate the perfectionism and social anxiety. Self -critical rumination and perfectionism had a negative association with each other's.

So hypothesis proved that there was a positive relationship between maladaptive perfectionism and self-critical rumination in young adults. Individual who had maladaptive behavior and perfectinalism in their life leads towards high self-critical rumination.

H2: There was likely to be a positive relationship between parental expectation and self-critical rumination among young adults.

This hypothesis suggests that there is a positive correlation between parental expectation and self-critical rumination ($r = .41, p < .001$). Regression analysis indicate that parental expectations significantly predicted self-critical rumination ($\beta = .227, t = 3.19, p = .002$). The results find that higher parental expectations are associated with increased level of self-critical rumination.

Moreria and Canavarro, (2018) conducted a qualitative study to examine the linked between parental stress and self-critical rumination. Result of this study stated that there was a positive correlation between parental expectation and self-critical rumination in children.

H0 (Null hypothesis): there is likely to be no significant relationship between maladaptive perfectionism, parental expectations, and self-critical rumination.

Null hypothesis was rejected. All predictors showed significant positive relationship with self-critical rumination in both correlation and regression analysis.

These findings are supported by previous literature. O'Connor et al. (2007) found that perfectionism was strongly associated with depression, reinforcing the link between high self-standard and negative thought. Similarly, Amini et al. (2006) highlighted that excessive parental expectation predicted anxiety and self-critical thinking in Iranian students.

Conclusion

This study helped us to understand how maladaptive perfectionism and parental expectation formed self-critical rumination in young adults. The results showed both personal or parental expectation can make people thinking negatively about themselves. The finding clearly showed that young adults who struggle with self-directed standard and feel loaded by parental expectation are more likely to fall into the self-criticism thoughts. This study not only add existing knowledge about maladaptive perfectionism and rumination but also emphasize how important it is to consider the cultural and family background of each person. As awareness about mental health increase in Pakistan studies like this can help to improve treatment and support for young adults.

Limitation

- The study relied on self-report questionnaires, which may have introduced social desirability bias. Particularly in a culture where mental health is disgraced.
- The sample size was limited to 200 participants, which may not accurately represent the broader population of young adult in Pakistan
- Gender specific analysis was not conducted.
- The study only conducted in urban areas. limiting the concept to ruler population where parenting style and expectation may differ

Suggestions

- Future study should be mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to better understanding about casual pathways between maladaptive perfectionism, parental expectations, and self-critical rumination.
- Qualitative interviews or focus groups could provide deeper insight.
- Researchers should expand sample size by including both urban and ruler participants.
- Family-based interventions should be explored in future studied to examine transforming parenting style can reduce the impact of maladaptive perfectionism on young adults mental health.

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