



Fear of intimacy, perfectionism and rejection sensitivity among young adults

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Date of Submission: 01-04-2024

Date of Acceptance: 09-04-2024

ABSTRACT: The aim of the current study was to understand the relationship between fear of intimacy, perfectionism and rejection sensitivity among young adults between 18-35 years of age. A sample of 200 individuals was taken from different regions of India through nonprobability convenience sampling technique. Fear of intimacy scale (FIS), The Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS) and Rejection Sensitivity questionnaire, adult version (A-RSQ) were used to measure the levels of fear of intimacy, perfectionism and rejection sensitivity. To assess the relationship between fear of intimacy, perfectionism and rejection sensitivity, Spearman's correlation was used. To find out the difference between genders in fear of intimacy, perfectionism and rejection sensitivity an independent sample t-test was used. The findings of the study showed that there was a positive weak correlation between perfectionism and fear of intimacy, and between rejection sensitivity and perfectionism. A weak positive correlation at the 0.01 significance level was found between rejection sensitivity and fear of intimacy, indicating that as fear of intimacy increases, so does rejection sensitivity, and vice versa. A significant difference was found in perfectionism between males and females and no significant difference in rejection sensitivity and fear of intimacy between males and females.

Keywords: Fear of Intimacy, Perfectionism, Rejection Sensitivity, Young adults.

1. INTRODUCTION

The tendency to perform or expect others to perform a task flawlessly and to strive for perfection in every circumstance, setting high standards for oneself is known as perfectionism. Many researchers have given different definitions for perfectionism. Hollender termed perfectionism

in 1965, "It is an act of expecting more from oneself or other people than what is necessary in a given circumstance". Whereas Frost, Marten, Lahart and Rosenblate (1990) termed perfectionism as "setting excessively high standards of self-expression, accompanied by excessively critical self-evaluation" (Fang & Liu., 2022). Perfectionism has both negative and positive aspects. Positive aspect refers to the behaviour which motivates an individual to succeed in high level goals through reinforcement, whereas negative aspect refers to the setting unrealistic goals, high and flawless level of performance because of the fear of failure.

The Perfectionism social disconnection model

According to the perfectionism social disconnection model, perceived social detachment is caused by the interpersonal dysfunction linked to perfectionism. This model suggests that perfectionism leads to a range of interpersonal issues, including anger and interpersonal oversensitivity, individual differences and personalities, social detachment, alienation, and a sense of not belonging. Furthermore, depression symptoms and interpersonal difficulties are linked to perfectionistic ideas (Barnett & Johnson., 2016).

Fear of intimacy

Intimacy is a feeling of closeness that goes beyond physical touch and can foster emotional, mental, and spiritual understanding (Telloian., 2022). One intrapersonal characteristic that is frequently mentioned for its crucial role in the formation of intimate relationships and its favorable correlation with marital pleasure is the ability to establish intimacy (Martin and Ashby., 2004). An intimate relationship is any interpersonal connection that is regarded as essential to human existence. It entails the emotional, psychological,



and physical closeness necessary for both mental and physical health. Closeness on all levels—emotional, physical, sexual, and intellectual—is what is meant by intimacy. Intimacy can cause fear and anxiety and make it difficult for some people to build strong relationships with others.

From the attachment theory perspective early attachment experiences, where emotional vulnerability is linked to parental rejection, are the source of adult avoidance intimacy. Adult avoidance intimacy is thought to be mediated by negative models of others that are created because of traumatic experiences (Bartholomew., 1990). According to the theory, people have an inbuilt system that promotes connecting with others, particularly carers, by activating happy feelings when near those particular people and unpleasant emotions, such worry or distress, when they are not. Thus, interactive encounters with important carers from birth result in the creation of working models for self and attachment relationships.

Rejection sensitivity

Rejection sensitivity is a personality trait that causes a person to expect, perceive, and respond strongly to rejection, whether genuine or perceived (Herndon., 2023). It is well accepted that one of the primary human motivations is the need to be accepted and to avoid rejection (Downey & Feldman., 1996). The fulfillment of the needs has an impact on an individual's growth, wellbeing, and behavior. Disruption in the fulfillment of the urge to belong, the person's emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses will follow, which could lead to the emergence of emotional distress (Staebler et al., 2011). Numerous basic human requirements are met by social relationships. Some people find it too difficult to build and sustain those relationships, so they resort to self-defeating coping mechanisms that endanger their relationships and other objectives in life.

Interpersonal acceptance–rejection theory

According to the theory, emotional coldness, animosity, violence, apathy, neglect, and/or the lack of or retreat from behaviorally displayed affection are some of the components of rejection by parents and other attachment figures. On the other hand, according to IPAR Theory, acceptance is the warmth, compassion, concern, care, support, nurturing, or just plain love that a person might feel and show towards another through verbal, physical, or purely symbolic but culturally recognised signs of approbation, support,

or endearment. Perceived parental rejection during childhood is likely to cause a variety of socioemotional challenges, according to IPAR Theory. Social cognition deficits, or distortions in mental representations (beliefs and expectations about oneself, important others, interpersonal relationships, or life in general), are among them (Ibrahim et al., 2015).

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Researchers James Martin & Jeffery Ashby (2004) found that people with perfectionism have more fear of intimacy than the people without perfectionism. Perfectionists face difficulty in forming intimate relationships. In another study conducted on 183 Israeli community participants concluded that young adults who seek perfectionism in every situation, they are more likely to need validation and they are sensitive towards rejection. They try to avoid rejection compared to the young adults who have a low level of perfectionism. Socially prescribed perfectionism and perfectionistic self-presentation were linked with high levels of rejection sensitivity. Further findings were that socially prescribed perfectionism linked with rejection sensitivity increases the chances of developing depressive symptoms (Flett et al., 2014).

Giovazolias,T & Paschalidi, E (2022) Found that paternal acceptance is the major reason for not expressing intimacy, it was concluded that women with high interpersonal anxiety and rejection sensitivity have a very rare chance of developing fear of intimacy compared to men. Research conducted by Geraldine Downey and Scott I. Feldman (1996) on Implications of Rejection Sensitivity for Intimate Relationships discovered that rejection sensitivity damages romantic relationships. It caused people to overestimate their partners' discontent and desire to end the relationship because of feeling insecure and unsatisfied with their partnerships. Caren Rebeccah Zebuline & Dr. S Thenmozhi (2022) found contradicting results compared to other studies that fear of intimacy is high on people without perfectionism, maladaptive perfectionists were found to be high on fear of intimacy. Fear of intimacy was higher on those who were not in a relationship. Shanara Visvalin gam, Natasha R. Magson, Amie R. Newins, Melissa M. Norberg (2023) found that perfectionistic characteristics may be related with rejection sensitivity and animosity to various degrees between people; these behaviors may not induce social alienation within people.



III. METHODOLOGY

Objectives

- To assess the relationship between fear of intimacy and perfectionism among young adults.
- To assess the relationship between fear of intimacy and rejection sensitivity among young adults.
- To assess the relationship between perfectionism and rejection sensitivity among young adults

Hypotheses

- There is a significant relationship between fear of intimacy and perfectionism.
- There is a significant relationship between fear of intimacy and rejection sensitivity.
- There is a significant relationship between perfectionism and rejection sensitivity.

Sampling procedure and Techniques

The population for this study comprised young individuals aged 18 to 35 from diverse regions across India. To obtain a sample that reflects this diversity, a non-probability convenience sampling technique was used. The study aimed to include 200 participants within the specified age range. Participants took part in the study through online, utilizing social media platforms (Instagram, whatsapp, Facebook). Informed consent was obtained from each participant, prior to their involvement in the study. The consent form, provided in English language, outlined the study's purpose, and the rights of the participants. Data collection occurred through the administration of a structured questionnaire, which focused on measuring fear of intimacy, rejection sensitivity, and perfectionism.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 shows the correlation between perfectionism and fear of intimacy

Variable	N	r	p
Fear of intimacy	200	.126	.076
Perfectionism	200	-	-

Correlation is significant at .05

The above table shows the Spearman's correlation between perfectionism and fear of intimacy. The result was found to be weak positive correlation ($r = 0.126$, $p > 0.05$). Hence the alternate hypothesis is rejected stating that there is no significant relationship between fear of intimacy and perfectionism. Which indicated that individuals with perfectionism traits may not be afraid of

intimacy and vice versa. Findings align with previous research on "Dimensions of perfectionism and irrational fears: an examination with fear survey schedule". The fear survey consists of 5 factors representing social fears (feeling of rejected by others), agoraphobic fears (being in a strange place), fears of bodily injury/death (dead people), fears of sexual / aggressive scene (nude



men/women, tough looking people), and fears of harmless animals (flying insects). It was found that from the dimensions of perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism had no significant association with specific fears. The dimension was less associated with being in a strange place and fear about being alone. There was no significant association with other fears (Blankstein et al., 1993).

Table 3 shows the correlation between fear of intimacy and rejection sensitivity

Variable	N	r	p
Fear of intimacy	200	.238**	.001
Rejection sensitivity	200	-	-

Note** correlation is significant at 0.01 level

The above table shows the Spearman's correlation between fear of intimacy and rejection sensitivity. The result was found to be positively correlated ($r = 0.238$, $p < 0.01$). Hence the alternate hypothesis is accepted stating that there is a significant relationship between fear of intimacy and rejection sensitivity. This indicates that an increase in rejection sensitivity can influence an increase in fear of intimacy and vice versa. Findings align with previous research shows, through increasing interpersonal anxiety, fear of intimacy is developed by the effect of rejection sensitivity in females (Giovazolias & Paschalidi., 2022).

Table 4 shows the correlation between rejection sensitivity and perfectionism

Variable	N	r	p
Rejection sensitivity	200	.082	.248
Perfectionism	200	-	-

Correlation is significant at 0.05 level

The above table shows the Spearman's correlation between perfectionism and rejection sensitivity. The result was found to be weak positive correlation ($r = 0.082$, $p > 0.05$). Hence the alternate hypothesis is rejected stating that there is no significant relationship between perfectionism and rejection sensitivity. This indicates that rejection sensitive individuals might not have perfectionism traits and vice versa. The findings are consistent with prior research on "Perfectionism and Interpersonal Sensitivity in Social Phobia: The Interpersonal Aspects of Perfectionism". The interpersonal sensitivity measurement tool was used to assess five subscales: interpersonal awareness, desire for approval, timidity, fragile inner-self, and separation anxiety. The sample was divided into two groups: clinical and non-clinical

samples. The findings revealed that perfectionism and interpersonal sensitivity are not significantly correlated. However, dimensions of perfectionism and interpersonal sensitivity are related to each other. (Kumari et al., 2012).



Table 5 shows t-test results between males and female in perfectionism, fear of intimacy and rejection sensitivity

Variable	Females			Males			t	p
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD		
Rejection sensitivity	153	10.62	3.36	47	10.06	3.38	.993	.689
perfectionism	153	108.7	18.53	47	106.51	26.58	.530	.002
Fear of intimacy	153	85.03	21.85	47	82.83	20.21	.639	.426

Table 5 shows the independent t-test results. The total sample size was 200 from which 153 were females and 47 were males. For rejection sensitivity, the mean score for female was 10.62 and for males was 10.06 which suggests that on average females have higher rejection sensitivity compared to males. The standard deviation for females was found to be 3.36 and for males, it was found to be 3.38 which indicates that both groups have similar variability. The t-value was found to be .993 and the significant value was .689 ($p>0.05$) which indicates that there is no significant difference in rejection sensitivity between males and females. For perfectionism the mean score for the females was 108.73 and for males was 106.51 which suggests that on average females have higher level of perfectionism compared to males. The standard deviation for females was 18.53 and for males it was found to be 26.58 which indicates that the males have the greater variability suggesting more diversity within the male group. The t-value was found to be .530 and significant value was .002 ($p<0.01$) which indicates that there is significant difference in perfectionism between males and females. For fear of intimacy the mean score for the females was 85.03 and for males was 82.83 which indicates that on average females have higher fear of intimacy compared to males. The standard deviation for females was found to be 21.85 and for males it was found to be 20.21 which indicates that the females have the slight greater variability compared to males. The t-value was found to be .639 and significant value was found to be .426 ($p>0.05$) which indicates that there is no significant difference in fear of intimacy between males and females.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the hypothesis, the findings are

- There is no significant relationship between fear of intimacy and perfectionism among young adults.

- There is a significant relationship between fear of intimacy and rejection sensitivity among young adults.
- There is no significant relationship between perfectionism and rejection sensitivity among young adults.
- There is significant difference in perfectionism between males and females.

Understanding the interconnectedness of fear of intimacy, perfectionism, and rejection sensitivity can guide therapists in tailoring interventions for young adults facing psychological distress, while in academic and workspace settings, recognizing how perfectionist tendencies impact collaboration and communication can foster a more supportive environment. Addressing perfectionism's influence on rejection sensitivity can cultivate a culture of growth and constructive feedback. However, limitations such as lengthy questionnaires impacting data reliability, gender imbalance in samples, and overlooking mediating factors like socio-economic status and trauma suggest avenues for further research. Future studies should aim for broader population representation, explore variables in romantic relationships and cultural backgrounds, and delve into qualitative research to deepen understanding of these psychological constructs.

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