ABSTRACT

The present empirical investigation entitled “Perfectionism, Attributional Styles, and Self-Efficacy in Relation to Psychological Distress among Adolescents” sought to identify a set of predictors that contributed to the experience of psychological distress. Many evidence indicated that factors like maladaptive perfectionism, negative Attributional style and low self-efficacy significantly correlated with psychological distress, but, unfortunately till today no systematic efforts have been made to explore the role of above such factors on Indian students.

Psychological distress

Different psychologists have given different viewpoints in relation to definition of psychological distress. Mirowsky and Ross (1989) add that psychological distress is the unpleasant subjective state of depression and anxiety (being tense, restless, worried irritable and afraid), which has both emotional and psychological manifestations. They further added that there is a wide range of psychological distress, ranging from mild to extreme, with extreme levels being considered as mental illness such as schizoaffective disorder. Chalfant et al. (1990) defined psychological distress as a continuous experience of unhappiness, nervousness, irritability and problematic interpersonal relationships.

Perfectionism

Individuals try to express their capabilities, potentials and talents to fullest extent possible. There is an inborn tendency among persons that direct them to actualize their inherited nature. Rogers suggested that each person also have a concept of ideal self. An ideal self is the self that person would like to be. When there is a congruency between
actual and ideal self a person is generally happy and satisfied. Discrepancy between the actual and ideal self often results in unhappiness and dissatisfaction. According to Rogers people have a tendency to maximize self-concept through self-actualization. Perfectionism is a personality construct characterized by the striving for flawlessness and setting high standards (Flett & Hewitt, 2002). Most researchers defined perfectionism, and agree that standard for performance are essential to the perfectionism According to Burns (1980) perfectionism refers to a personality that possessed by individuals whose standards are extreme, who compulsively attempt to achieve impossible goals, and evaluate themselves in the basis of accomplishment.

**Attributional Style**

The term attribution is used to refer to the individual perception of causations, that is his explanation, as to why the experiences and events have taken place. In other words how people perceive and explain the cause of their own as well as others behavior. How one person thinks and feel about themselves and another person (Heider, 1958). There are three dimensions of attributional style: i.e. locus, stability and globality.

1. **Locus: Internal vs. External Causes:** Locus of causality refers to whether the outcome was due to something about the person (internal) or something about the situation or circumstances (external).

2. **Stability: Stable vs. Unstable Causes:** Stability refers to whether the cause will again be present (stable) or is temporary (unstable).

3. **Globality: Global vs. Specific Causes:** The third dimension is globality. Globality, refers to whether the cause influences just this particular situation (specific explanation) or
whether it influences other areas of respondent’s life (global explanation) (Tennen & Herzberger, 1985).

**Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy is self-perception of an individual’s capability which becomes instrumental when he pursue to the goals and the control which he can exercise over his environments. Albert Bandura (1977a) focused on human behavior and motivation in which he described that self-efficacy as individual’s belief about their own capabilities which guides the person that what actually they are capable of accomplishing. It is the belief which they hold about their capabilities which help in determining what a person can do with knowledge and skills which he possesses. Strong or high self-efficacy leads to improved goal setting and attainment mastery, perseverence and positive self-regard on the other hand low self-efficacy lead to negative mood, pessimism, stress, tension and psychological distress.

The following hypotheses were formulated:

1. Perfectionism will emerge important predictor of psychological distress (i.e., 1.1 and 1.2).
   
   1.1 Adaptive perfectionism will emerge as a negative predictor of psychological distress.
   
   1.2 Maladaptive perfectionism will positively predict psychological distress.

2. Self-efficacy will negatively predict psychological distress.

3. Attributional style will also emerge the important predictor of psychological distress. (i.e., 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4).
3.1 Composite attributional style for positive events will emerge as a negative predictor of psychological distress.

3.2 Internal, stable and global dimensions of attribution for the positive events will negatively predict to psychological distress.

3.3 Composite attributional style for negative events will positively predict psychological distress.

3.4 Internal, stable and global dimensions of attribution for negative events will positively predict psychological distress.

4. Academic achievement will negatively predict psychological distress.

5. Predictors of psychological distress for boys and girls will be different.

6. Predictors of psychological distress for Science and Arts students will be different.

7. Predictors of psychological distress for students of nuclear and joint family’s will be different.

**Methodology**

Methodology is a total sum of various steps which are carried out by researchers systematically in order to carry out a scientific research. In the light of above fact and the nature of present research problem the following step are taken into consideration such as:

**Sample of the Study**

The sample of the present investigation comprised of \( N = 300 \) male and female Senior Secondary School students studying at Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India. Average age of the students was found to be 17.5 years.
Tools used

In present investigation four important measures were used namely, Almost Perfect Scale (Revised), Attributional Style Questionnaire, General Self-Efficacy Scale- (Hindi Version), PGI Health Questionnaire with a personal or demographic data sheet systematically. The details of these tools in brief are given below:

Almost Perfect Scale- Revised: The Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R; Slaney et al., 2001) consists of 23 items to assess both adaptive and maladaptive components of perfectionism. The APS-R contains three subscales i.e. Standards (7 items), Order (4 items) and Discrepancy (12 items) which are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7). The reliability and validity of this scale has been found quit satisfactory.

Attributional Style Questionnaire: This questionnaire was developed by Peterson et al. (1982) and is made up of 12 different hypothetical situations, consisting of 6 good events (three achievement and three affiliation events) and 6 bad events (three achievement and three affiliation events). The internal reliability coefficient .75 and .72 for the composite positive and negative events, and validity of this scale was found highly satisfactory.

General Self-Efficacy Scale-Hindi Version: General Self-Efficacy (GSE) scale was developed by Jerusalem and Schwarzer. He first developed originally the German version of this scale as 20-items and later he translated this scale into German to English and reduced 10-items (Jerusalem & Schwarzer, 1992). After a short period of time Sud (2002) also translated this scale from English to Hindi version. Therefore, General self-efficacy scale (Hindi version) consists of 10-items rated on four point rating scale with the
response categories. The reliability coefficient of this scale was found to be ranging between 0.76 to 0.90 and validity of this scale is well established.

**PGI Health Questionnaire:** PGI Health Questionnaire (N-1), it was developed by Verma, Wig, and Pershad (1985). This scale is comprised of 38 items including part A & B. Part A (physical distress) of the scale consist of 16 items and B (psychological distress) 22 items. For scoring of this scale the number of ticks on section A and B. The test-retest’ and ‘split half’ reliability was found to be 0.88 and 0.86 respectively and validity of this scale is found highly satisfactory.

**Personal Data Sheet:** Personal data sheet include information regarding age, sex, religion, state/city, educational qualification, rural/urban, present position, etc. taken from adolescents.

**Procedure:** The data was collected on students, who were studying in senior secondary schools of Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. The investigator met the subjects in groups of 5 to 10 students. They were asked volunteer themselves to participate as the subjects of the study. After getting their consent respondents were given a set of questionnaires, such as Perfectionism scale, Attributional Style Questionnaire, General Self-Efficacy Scale and Psychological Distress Scale in a booklet form. Then, after the investigator established a rapport with the respondents and requested them to fill the Demographic Information Sheet first. After that the Perfectionism Scale was administered, the researcher read the instructions loudly before the respondents and explained how to fill the questionnaire. If any difficulty was encountered by any respondent, the investigator explained the items of Perfectionism scale verbally and helped her/him to give the correct response. After completing Perfectionism Scale, the researcher explained about
Attributional Style Questionnaire and asked respondents to give their frank responses. Similarly other two questionnaires were also administered over the respondents.

Finally, all the respondents were ensured that their response would be kept confidential.

**Statistical Analyses**

Stepwise multiple regression analyses were conducted to identify the set of variables predicting psychological distress in the sample as a whole, and different subgroups like amongst boys and girls and in two stream groups. Regression analyses for nuclear and joint family groups were not carried out because the two groups did not significantly differ on psychological distress. Before conducting regression analyses, descriptive statistics like mean, SD, t-test analyses for group comparisons, and simple correlations were also used. All these statistical techniques were applied by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, 16 version).

**Findings of the study**

The following results were obtained:

1. For the total sample stepwise multiple regression analysis yielded five predictors which accounted for as much as 58.7% of the total variance in psychological distress. These variables were composite attribution for negative events, composite attribution for positive events, discrepancy of perfectionism, stream (Science vs. Arts) and self-efficacy.

2. Four variables emerged as useful predictors of psychological distress for male students such as composite negative, discrepancy of perfectionism, self-efficacy and composite positive.
3. For female students also four predictors were identified such as composite negative, composite positive, academic achievement and discrepancy of perfectionism.

4. Composite negative, composite positive and discrepancy were found to be the common predictors of psychological distress among boys and girls.

5. Self-efficacy was negatively predicted for psychological distress only for boys.

6. Academic achievement had negative predictive relationship with psychological distress only for girls.

7. Composite attribution for negative events and discrepancy of perfectionism had positive predictive relationship with psychological distress, among both boys and girls, while composite attribution for positive event emerged as a negative predictor for psychological distress.

8. Regression analysis for the Science students causes four predictors viz. composite negative, discrepancy of perfectionism, composite positive, and self-efficacy.

9. For the Arts group a set of four predictors were identified i.e. composite positive, composite negative, discrepancy and self-efficacy.

10. A comparison of predictors in Science and Arts groups revealed that composite negative and discrepancy of perfectionism was most important predictors of psychological distress for Science stream while its contribution was least for Arts stream.

11. For Arts students’ composite positive was the most useful predictor of psychological distress while its contribution was least for Science students.
12. Self-efficacy was the equally important for predicting psychological distress among Science and Arts students.

13. No significant difference in psychological distress could be obtained between girls and boys.

14. t-test show that Science students reported less symptoms of psychological distress as compared to Arts students.

15. No significant difference in psychological distress could be obtained between the students belonging to nuclear and joint families.

Indeed, this study was a humble attempt to examine the predictive relationship between perfectionism, attributional style and self-efficacy in relation to psychological distress among adolescents. The results of the study indicated significant relationship between predictor variables and criterion variable. This study has given new direction for further research in the concerned area.