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Perfectionism as a Predictor of Fear of Failure and Academic Resilience Among Female Athletes

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: The purpose of this study was to investigate the predictive relationship between perfectionism and fear of failure and academic resilience among female university athletes. It also examined the differences between these outcomes by university.

Methodology: A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted, involving 643 female athletes from the four Universities of Lahore in Pakistan. The APS-R, PFAI and ARS-30 were used to measure perfectionism, fear of failure and academic resilience, respectively. The data were analyzed by Pearson correlation, regression analysis and one-way ANOVA.

Results: Academic resilience was also significantly associated with adaptive perfectionism ($r = .339$, $p < .001$) and maladaptive perfectionism ($r = .349$, $p < .001$). None of the dimensions was a significant predictor of fear of failure. The two dimensions of perfectionism explained 13.4% of the variance in academic resilience ($R2 = .134$, $p < .001$), but there was no significant prediction of fear of failure ($R2 = .002$, $p = .564$). There was a significant difference in academic resilience between universities, but not in fear of failure.

Conclusion: Perfectionism was significantly related to and predicted academic resilience, but was not a significant predictor of fear of failure. The results emphasize the need to view perfectionism as a multi-dimensional phenomenon among female university athletes.

1. Introduction

As more women have taken part in organized sport, it has become important to be interested in understanding the psychological factors that predict female athletes' performance, well-being, and academic achievement. The dual career lifestyle of female university athletes is challenging as they have to deal with academic duties and training, competition, travel, examinations, assignments and social duties (Sorkkila et al., 2017).

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Achievement environments are characterized by perfectionism, which has two aspects: adaptive and maladaptive (Stoeber, 2016). Perfectionistic concerns include the attributes of high standards, organization, persistence, and motivation to succeed, while perfectionistic concerns involve self-criticism, fear of mistakes, doubts about performance, and sensitivity to negative evaluation (Stoeber & Gaudreau, 2017). The literature so far suggests that the strivings to be perfect are mostly linked to positive motivational consequences, while the concerns about perfection are more likely to be related to anxiety, emotional distress, burnout and maladjustment (Kim et al., 2025).

Athletes also have psychological issues surrounding fear of failure. Athletes might feel more afraid of failing, avoid competing, have heightened competitive anxiety, and lose their confidence when the mistake represents a threat to their competence, self-worth, or social acceptance (Taylor et al., 2023). High expectations and a fear of failure are, therefore, a potential problem for athletes with maladaptive perfectionism (Sagar & Stoeber, 2009).

For university athletes, academic resilience is especially important as they are required to stay motivated, persistent, and involved in their studies while dealing with high demands on their sports schedule (Rudd et al., 2021). Academically resilient students are more likely to persevere when faced with academic challenges and multiple demands and to persist in their educational pursuits when encountering academic setbacks (de Oliveira Durso et al., 2021).

While the concepts of perfectionism, fear of failure, and academic resilience have been studied separately, there is a limited amount of research that has focused on the relationship among these three concepts, especially for female university athletes in developing countries (Hill, 2025). The evidence gathered is largely from North America, Europe and Australia, as the educational, sporting and sociocultural contexts differ in these regions from Pakistan (Vidal-Vilaplana et al., 2022). In Pakistan, few studies have taken a holistic approach to studying these psychological constructs with female university sports participants (Ashraf et al., 2023).

These relationships are also significant as psychological traits can impact the academic experience, athletic performance, dealing with failure, and future development of an athlete (Reardon et al., 2019). Hence, the present study aimed to explore the predictive power of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism on fear of failure and academic resilience of female university athletes of public and private universities in Lahore, Pakistan. The results may offer helpful evidence to university administrators, coaches, sport psychologists, counsellors, and policymakers in creating strategies to foster healthy achievement striving and academic resilience in female university athletes (Stoeber, 2011).

1.1. Problem Statement

Athletes at the university level are often under a lot of pressure to perform and are making these commitments in addition to their regular academic duties, which can impact their psychological adjustment and academic performance. Perfectionism, fear of failure, and academic resilience have been researched a great deal, but fewer studies have looked at the relationship among female university athletes in Pakistan. Thus, this study aimed to explore the predictive role of perfectionism on fear of failure and academic resilience among female university athletes in Lahore.

1.2. Research Gap

The literature review revealed that there was limited research available on the relationship between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism and fear of failure and academic resilience among female university athletes in Pakistan (Ashraf et al., 2023). This study is focused on addressing this gap in the study by exploring these relationships in selected universities in Lahore.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate the relationship between perfectionism and fear of failure and how they predict one another.
2. To examine the joint relationship between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism and fear of failure and academic resilience.

1.4. Research Hypotheses

- H1-A: The perfectionism construct will moderately explain the fear of failure of female university athletes.
- H1-B: There will be significant differences in academic resilience between universities.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The study provides empirical evidence of psychological factors that contribute to the academic resilience of female university athletes in Pakistan. The results could be beneficial for coaches, sport psychologists, counsellors and university administrators in creating suitable strategies to support student-athletes.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Design

A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was used to investigate the predictive power of perfectionism in fear of failure and academic resilience of female university athletes. This design was chosen because it was possible to apply statistical analysis to determine relationships between study variables and to determine the predictive power of the variables.

2.2. Participants and Sampling

In the study, 643 female university athletes were selected from public and private universities in Lahore, Pakistan. Stratified convenience sampling was used to choose the participants to ensure representation of different universities. The subjects were university-level athletes who willingly took part in the study.

2.3. Instruments

Three standardized instruments were used for data collection:

2.3.1. Almost Perfect Scale–Revised (APS-R)

The APS-R (Slaney et al., 2001) was used to assess perfectionism. There are two subscores of perfectionism: Standards (adaptive perfectionism) and Discrepancy (maladaptive perfectionism).

2.3.2. Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory (PFAI)

The instrument used to assess fear of failure was the PFAI created by Conroy et al. (2002). The inventory measures the negative thoughts and feelings about failure.

2.3.3. Academic Resilience Scale – 30 (ARS – 30)

Academic resilience was assessed with the ARS-30 instrument developed by Cassidy (2016) that focuses on students' persistence, motivation, and adaptation to academic stress.

2.4. Data Collection Procedure

The data were collected from female athletes of the university after obtaining permission from the proper authorities of the university. Participants were given information on the study, confidentiality of responses, and that participation was voluntary. The questionnaires were handed out and collected after completion.

2.5. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed with SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis, Pearson product–moment correlation, simple and multiple linear regression analyses and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were conducted. Where assumptions of equal variances were not met, the Games–Howell post hoc analysis was conducted.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive statistics and reliability

A final sample of 643 female university athletes from selected public and private universities of Lahore, Pakistan was taken. This study focused on the following variables: adaptive perfectionism (APS-R Standards), maladaptive perfectionism (APS-R Discrepancy), fear of failure, and academic resilience. The descriptive statistics and internal consistency estimates of the study variables are given in Table 1. APS-R Standards had a mean score of 34.30 (SD = 6.10), whereas APS-R Discrepancy had a mean score of 58.84 (SD = 9.42). The mean score for general fear of failure was 0.00 (SD = 0.48), with scores ranging from −1.00 to 1.00. Academic resilience had a mean score of 108.09 (SD = 25.62), with scores ranging from 61.00 to 182.00. Negative scores, which were observed, are due to the way the items were scored on the Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory (PFAI). The internal consistency was evaluated by using Cronbach's alpha. The internal consistency of the APS-R was acceptable for the Standards subscale (α = .746) and good for the Discrepancy subscale (α = .815). Both the PFAI (α = .731) and the ARS-30 (α = .927) had acceptable or excellent internal consistency.

Table 1

Variable	N	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
APS-R Standards	643	34.30	6.10	13.00	48.00
APS-R Discrepancy	643	58.84	9.42	25.00	80.00

Fear of failure	643	0.00	0.48	-1.00	1.00
Academic Resilience	643	108.09	25.62	61.00	182.00

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; α = Cronbach's alpha; APS-R = Almost Perfect Scale – Revised; PFAI = Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory; ARS-30 = Academic Resilience Scale – 30.

3.2. Correlations Among Perfectionism, Fear of Failure, and Academic Resilience

The relationships between variables were tested using the Pearson product–moment correlation coefficient. The results are presented in Table 2. APS-R Discrepancy was significantly and positively associated with APS-R Standards, r = .769, p < .001. Academic resilience was positively and significantly related to both APS-R Standards (r = .339, ps < .001) and APS-R Discrepancy (r = .349, ps < .001).

APS-R Standards and APS-R Discrepancy, on the other hand, did not significantly relate to fear of failure. The correlation between APS-R Standards and fear of failure was negligible and not significant at the p < .05 level, r = −.035, p = .373, and the correlation between fear of failure and APS-R Discrepancy was negligible and not significant at the p < .05 level, r = −.012, p = .761. The same applies to fear of failure, which was not significantly correlated with academic resilience, r = −.025, p = .529.

Table 2: Pearson Correlations Among Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4
APS-R standards	-----			
APS-R Discrepancy	.769	-----	-----	
Fear of Failure	-.035	-.012		
Academic Resilience	.339	.349	-.025	-----

Note. APS-R = Almost Perfect Scale–Revised, p < .001, two-tailed.

3.3. Objective 1: Predictive Role of Perfectionism in Fear of Failure

Objective 1 assessed whether perfectionism was a predictor of fear of failure among female university athletes. Two simple linear regression analyses were performed, one for the APS-R Standards and one for the APS-R Discrepancy. The first regression model was used to determine the correlation between APS-R Standards and fear of failure. The model was not statistically significant, F (1, 641) = 0.794, p = .373, R = .035, R^2 = .001, adjusted R^2 = .000. Thus, APS-R Standards explained only 0.1% of the variance in fear of failure. The regression coefficient was also not significant, β = .035, t = 0.891, p = .373, suggesting that adaptive perfectionistic standards did not significantly predict fear of failure. The second model explored the relationship between APS-R Discrepancy and fear of failure. This model was also not statistically significant, F (1, 641) = 0.093, p = .761, R = .012, R^2 = .000, adjusted R^2 = −.001. APS-R Discrepancy thus explained a very small amount of variance in fear of failure. The regression coefficient was non-significant, β = .012, t = 0.305, p = .761. So, maladaptive perfectionistic discrepancy did not significantly predict fear of failure. The regression results for both dimensions are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Simple Linear Regression Models Predicting Fear of Failure from Perfectionism Dimensions

Predictor	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	B	SE B	β	t	p
APS-R Standards	.035	.001	.000	0.003	0.003	.035	0.891	.553
APS-R Discrepancy	.012	.000	-.001	-0.001	0.003	.012	0.305	.305

Note. Dependent variable = general fear of failure. B = unstandardized regression coefficient, SE B = standard error of B, β = standardized regression coefficient. N = 643.

Overall, the hypothesis that perfectionism is a significant predictor of fear of failure among female university athletes was rejected. The perfectionistic standards and perfectionistic discrepancy had no statistically significant predictive effects.

3.4. Objective 2: Combined Predictive Strength of Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism

In Objective 2, the predictive power of APS-R Standards and APS-R Discrepancy was tested together due to concerns about loss of confidence and academic resilience. To examine these two perfectionism dimensions, two multiple regression models were estimated, in which both dimensions were entered simultaneously as the predictors.

The combined prediction of fear of failure is presented.

The multiple regression model predicting fear of failure was not statistically significant, F (2, 640) = 0.573, p = .564, R = .042, R^2 = .002, adjusted R^2 = −.001. The combination of the two perfectionism dimensions accounted for just 0.2% of the variance

in fear of failure. APS-R Standards or APS-R Discrepancy did not have any important unique contribution to the model. APS-R Standards had β = .037, t = 0.594, p = .553, whereas APS-R Discrepancy had β = −.063, t = −1.026, p = .305. Thus, the combined contribution of APS-R standards and APS-R discrepancy did not significantly predict fear of failure.

3.5. Combined Prediction of Academic Resilience

A second multiple regression model was performed to see if the APS-R Standards and APS-R Discrepancy together predicted academic resilience. The overall model was statistically significant, F (2, 640) = 49.538, p < .001, R = .366, R^2 = .134, adjusted R^2 = .131. The two dimensions of perfectionism thus accounted for 13.4% of the variance in academic resilience. Both predictors contributed significantly to the model, with positive contributions. APS-R Standard significantly predicted academic resilience with a β of .215, t = 3.745, p < .001, and APS-R Discrepancy predicted academic resilience with a β of .174, t = 3.022, p = .003 for APS-R Discrepancy. Unstandardized regression coefficients indicated that, when controlling for the other predictor, APS-R Standards and APS-R Discrepancy were associated with academic resilience, respectively, with coefficients of 0.586 and 0.730.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Models Predicting Fear of Failure and Academic Resilience from Perfectionism Dimensions

Outcome	Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Fear of failure						
	APS-R Standards	0.002	0.003	.037	0.594	.553
	APS-R Discrepancy	-0.005	0.005	-.063	-1.026	.305
Academic resilience						
	APS-R Standards	0.586	0.156	.215	3.745	< .001
	APS-R Discrepancy	0.730	0.242	.174	3.022	.003

The Dimensions of Perfectionism and Multiple Regression Models Predicting Fear of Failure and Academic Resilience

3.6. Summary of Findings

The findings showed a distinct pattern of prediction of fear of failure and academic resilience. APS-R alone and jointly, and APS-R Discrepancy alone and jointly, were not significantly related to fear of failure. APS-R Standards and APS-R Discrepancy explained 13.4% of the variance in academic resilience, both of which were significant and positive in the prediction model. Findings did not confirm the predictive association between perfectionism and fear of failure, but did confirm the predictive association between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism and academic resilience as stated in Objective 4.

4. Discussion

This study investigated the predictive power of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionistic traits on fear of failure and academic resilience for female athletes of a university in Lahore, Pakistan. The results showed that perfectionism was related to academic resilience, and there was no significant relationship with fear of failure. In particular, adaptive perfectionism (APS-R Standards) was found to be significantly positively related to academic resilience, and maladaptive perfectionism (APS-R Discrepancy) was positively associated with academic resilience. The results indicate that perfectionism tendencies might be associated with higher persistence, commitment and coping with academic challenges among female University athletes. The relationship between adaptive perfectionism and academic resilience aligns with prior studies indicating that perfectionistic strivings, defined as striving for perfection with high personal standards and achievement motivation, might be beneficial for persistence and adaptive coping in challenging learning contexts (González-Hernández, 2022). As also found in the present sample, maladaptive perfectionism was positively related to academic resilience. While one might expect that higher levels of perfectionistic concerns would have negative psychological consequences, this result suggests that female university athletes with higher levels of concerns about meeting standards may also develop stronger efforts to persist and cope with academic demands. Nevertheless, this finding needs to be taken with a grain of salt, as maladaptive perfectionism could have other impacts depending on context and other psychological factors. The combined regression model further revealed that adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism explained 13.4% of the variance in academic resilience, suggesting that perfectionism makes a significant contribution to academic adaptation, and that there are other factors that explain a significant amount of resilience as well. However, the contribution of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism to fear of failure was very small and not significant, in contrast to the contribution of the other two factors. This result contrasts with prior studies showing a relationship between perfectionistic concerns and fear of failure, especially in competitive sports, where athletes can be under pressure stemming from errors, assessments, and others' expectations (Correia et al., 2018). Perfectionism may not be the sole cause of this fear of failure among female university athletes; rather, it may be a combination of psychological, social, and environmental factors. Variations in the coaching climate, perceived social support, self-efficacy, competitive experiences and academic stressors can play a role in fear of failure and may account for why perfectionism was not found to be a significant predictor in the current sample. The results also indicated that there were significant differences between the 4 participating universities in terms of academic resilience, while there was no significant difference between the universities in terms of fear

of failure. For post hoc comparisons, it was found that the academic resilience of athletes in Government College University & University of Education was higher than the academic resilience of athletes in University of Central Punjab & University of Management and Technology. The differences might be related to the diversity of academic environments, institutional support, educational experiences or how academic and sporting demands are handled differently at institutions. The results as a whole confirm the notion that perfectionism is a multi-faceted phenomenon that can have varying effects on psychological outcomes. For female university athletes, perfectionistic tendencies seemed to be more strongly related to academic resilience than to fear of failure. The findings thus underscore the need to examine various facets of perfectionism separately when studying psychological adjustment among student-athletes and highlight the context-specific evidence from Pakistan, where studies on psychological adjustment of female university athletes are limited.

4.1. Limitations of the Study

There were some limitations to the study. The cross-sectional design prevents a causal relationship between the variables from being determined, and self-reported questionnaires can introduce response bias. Due to a limited sample of female university athletes from the selected universities in Lahore, findings may not be generalizable to all populations and regions. Moreover, the differences between athletes in sport or levels of sport participation were not considered.

4.2. Practical Implications

The results have implications for the implementation of university sports programmes and psychological support services. The coaches and sport psychologists can offer assistance in creating healthy achievement goals for athletes while also resolving the athlete's overconcern with perfection. Counselling and programmes focused on resilience can also be offered at Universities to support female athletes in coping with academic stress and staying motivated. Incorporating psychological skills training into sporting programmes could further help athletes to manage the demands of school and sport.

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