SELF-COMPASSION AND PROCRASTINATION AMONG FIRST BORN AND LAST BORN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The present study was intended: first to measure the predictive association between procrastination and self-compassion among first born and last born university students; second to assess the differences on the variable of procrastination between first born and last born university students. A sample of 200 students (100 boys and 100 girls) was taken from different universities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. The Procrastination Scale (Lay, 1986) and Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003) were used. The data was analyzed using Regression Analyses and t-test. The results showed that self-compassion and its sub-scales of isolation and mindfulness significantly predicted procrastination in first born university students. Further, self-compassion is found to be insignificant predictor of procrastination in last born university students whereas its sub-scale of kindness significantly predicted procrastination in last born university students. Furthermore, differences between the first born and last born university students on the variable of procrastination are found to be insignificant. Implications of the findings and avenues for future research are suggested.

Keywords: Procrastination, Self-Compassion, First Born, Last Born,

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INTRODUCTION

Delaying takes away all the precious time that we have, unfortunately, we all are involved in this critical phenomenon. Procrastination is the intentional avoidance and irrational delay of behavior or tasks which need to be done and postponing today work till tomorrow (Steel, 2007). Procrastination not only affects individual's work but the individual persistently experiences the feelings of deficit, stress and guilt. Procrastination appears to be a self-defeating behavior pattern marked by short-term benefits and long term costs. It appears to reflect the human condition because it is presently widespread and has been reported for thousands of years (Ferrari, 1991; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984).

Lack of interest in any activity is usually the first step towards procrastination which in turn leads to some really poor outcomes. Delaying work leads to many problems in a student's life in general. He/she indulges in a useless activity resulting in a major waste of his/her precious time. Schouwenburg (1995) described that student procrastination is a result of three behavioral manifestations: 1) lack of promptness, either in intention or in behavior 2) intention-behavior discrepancy and 3) preference for competing activities. Individual can unconsciously delay tasks and engage in the unproductive repetitive behavior. The act may be threatening to the person's ego (Ferrari & Olivetti, 1993). Childhood traumas and faulty child rearing practices in case when parents are too permissive or too authoritarian could be the cause of procrastination.

Procrastination has been studied in context of self-compassion. According to Neff (2003) self-compassion is concern and feelings of sympathy towards oneself in event of failure to avoid one's own pain and the degree to which person demonstrates self-kindness. Being self-compassionate means that whether you win or lose, surpass your expectations or fall short, you still extend the same kindness, care and sympathy towards yourself. Neff postulated that self-compassion has three aspects. *First,* when individuals, accept and understand themselves, despite their perceived deficiencies, or faults, they are demonstrating self-compassion. *Second,* they recognize that pain and failure cannot be avoided, universal features of human experience. They do not feel a sense of loneliness after failures. *Third,* they show a balanced perspective of themselves and their emotions, they do not have disregarding thoughts or feelings.

Individuals with high self-compassion reported dramatically less procrastination tendency and motivation anxiety than those with low or moderate self-compassion (Williams, Stark, & Foster, 2008). In another study on a student population, those students who scored high on self-compassion were found less likely to engross strategies like procrastination (Sirois, 2014). Further, Skender (2011) examined the influence of self-compassion on academic procrastination and dysfunctional attitudes. Their findings indicated that self-compassion correlated negatively with academic procrastination and dysfunctional attitudes. In the same line, other studies have demonstrated that people having high self-compassion may better at controlling self-doubt and academic anxiety, which may reduce procrastination behavior (Neff, Hseih, & Dejitthirat, 2005; Schraw, Wadkins, & Olafson, 2007; Senecal, Koestner, & Vallerand, 1995).

Birth order acts a significant or considerable function in a child's life because the family relations are the first social structure to which a child is exposed (Leman, 1985). Birth order means the position of a person in the family. Each person is born with a distinct character and special gift that distinguishes them from every other person in the family tree and society. Adler was one of the first theorists to incorporate the concept of birth order into his work, using it with other information as a means to assess lifestyle. First-borns have an exceptional place in the family. The oldest child has responsible behavior. They are supposed as more hard-working and achieving than other children in family (Paulhus, Trapnell, & Chen, 1999). First born are more driven towards work and competition and have leadership abilities, are more logical, organized, aggressive, scholarly, low risk takers, set goals and reach them, tend to get more done in a day than others. On the other hand, last born children are more socially oriented and have an expectation from others to do things for them. These characteristics of the individual determine whether a person is likely to procrastinate (Adam, 1998).

Thus, it could be inferred that the first born are less likely to procrastinate than last born because of associated personality characteristic. However, the existing literature reveals inconsistent findings. Such as, Gabriel (2015) in their study demonstrated an association between birth order and procrastination with last born scoring high on procrastination. On contrary, Adam (1998) failed to demonstrate differences on procrastination between first born and last born. Similarly, another study by Saleem and Rafiques (2012) showed no differences between first and last born.

To sum up, procrastination is frequently prevalent in academic context. It produces negative consequences in students' life, including, poor grades, meeting deadlines, failure to accomplish goals and tasks, diminished subjective well-being, etc. Thus, researches are constantly exploring the factors that cause or maintain this troublesome behavior so that remedies could be planned accordingly for the vulnerable students. The present study is also an attempt in this regard with its objective to explore the predictive association between self-compassion (i.e., self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, self-kindness, and over identification) and procrastination in university students. Further, it is also evident that birth order influences individual's personality, behavior, and scholastic achievement. However, little has been explored regarding the association of birth order with procrastination. Also there are inconsistencies in the existing literature regarding this association and there is a need to explore further. Hence, contemplating this, the second objective of the study is to examine the differences on the variable of procrastination between first born and second born. This study has its own significance as understanding factors that reduces the likelihood of procrastination may help improve learning outcomes and have positive impact on overall well-being of students.

Following hypotheses are framed for the present study:

1. There would be a predictive association between self-compassion *(i.e., self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, self-kindness, and over identification)* and procrastination in first born university students.

2. There would be a predictive association between self-compassion *(i.e., self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, self-kindness, and over identification)* and procrastination in last born university students.

3. There would be differences on the variable of procrastination between first born and second born university students.

METHOD

Participants

The sample consisted of university students (N=200), purposively selected from different universities of Islamabad i.e., Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad, Bahria University Islamabad, Air University, Islamabad and Riphah

International University, Islamabad. Students were selected from each university having an equal number of male ($n = 100$) and female ($n = 100$). The age range of the sample was between 18 to 25 years with a mean age of 21.72 (Table 1). These students were enrolled in bachelors or master programs of different faculties.

Measures

Demographic Information Sheet

The demographic information sheet self-prepared was used to obtain demographic details of the sample including age, gender, birth order, name of department, and name of university.

Self-Compassion Scale (SCS)

The Self Compassion Scale was developed by Neff (2003) to assess self compassion and its six aspects: Self-Judgment, Common Humanity, Isolation, Mindfulness, Self-Kindness, and Over-identification. The SCS comprised of total 26-items rated on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from *1 = Almost Never* to *5= Almost Always*. Neff (2003) reported good validity and reliability cross culturally. The Cronbach's alpha reported by Neff, Kirkpatrick and Rude (2007) is .90. The Cronbach's alpha of the SCS obtained in the present study is found to be .85 which indicates good international consistency (Table 2).

Procrastination Scale (PS)

The Procrastination Scale (PS) is a self-report measure developed by Lay (1986). It consists of 20 items rated on 5-point Likert type scale, such as: *Extremely uncharacteristic= 1; Moderately uncharacteristic= 2; Neutral=3; Moderately uncharacteristic =4* and *Extremely uncharacteristic= 5*. Ten items are reversed keyed that are 3,4,6,8,11,13,14,15,18,20. The Cronbach's alpha reported by Lay (1986) for PS is .82 .The alpha reliability of the PS obtained in the present study is found to be .80 which indicates good internal consistency (Table 2).

Procedure

The university students were approached after getting institutional approval from the university authorities for the data collection. The students were

approached and they were briefed about the study purpose and were assured that the information obtained from them will be kept confidential. Informed consent was taken from all participants. Followed by Self-Compassion Scale and Procrastination Scales were administered. The students took almost 15 to 20 minutes in filling the scales. The students faced no difficulty in understanding the items of the scale and the response rate was 80 percent.

Scoring & Statistical Analysis

The research measures were scored. The data was analyzed through Statistical Package for Social Sciences. The *t*-test, linear regression analysis and multiple regression analysis are computed to test the hypotheses of the present study.

RESULTS

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for the Variables of Procrastination, Self-Compassion and its Sub-scales and Age of First Born and Last Born University Students

Variables	First Born n= 100		Last Born n= 100		Overall N = 200	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Procrastination	55.79	8.49	57.41	8.24	56.60	8.38
Self-Compassion	77.90	10.15	78.58	8.77	78.24	9.48
Self-Judgment	14.38	4.01	13.62	3.61	14.01	3.83
Common Humanity	12.70	3.83	13.29	3.38	12.99	3.62
Isolation	11.25	3.91	11.08	3.59	11.16	3.75
Mindfulness	12.70	3.64	13.69	3.44	13.19	3.57
Over-identification	11.41	3.38	11.09	2.98	11.25	3.18
Self-Kindness	15.46	3.83	15.69	3.94	15.57	3.88
Age	21.71	2.57	21.74	2.25	21.72	2.41

Table 2
Cronbach's Alpha of Procrastination Scale and Self-Compassion Scale and its Sub-scales (N=200)

Scale	No. of Items	α
Procrastination	20	.72
Self-Compassion	26	.75
Self-Judgment	05	.50
Common Humanity	04	.61
Isolation	04	.59
Mindfulness	04	.58
Over-identification	04	.54
Self-Kindness	05	.57

Table 3
Regression Analysis with Self-Compassion as predictor of Procrastination in First Born University Students (N = 100)

Scales	B	SE	B	R^2	F	Sig.
Constant	75.70	6.32				
Self-Compassion	-.26	.08	-.31	.09	10.09	.002*

*$p < .05$; $df = 1, 98$

Table 4
Multiple Regression Analysis with Sub-scales of Self-Compassion as predictors of Procrastination in First Born University Students (N = 100)

Variables	*B*	*SE*	*β*	*t*	*P*	*R²*	*F (Sig.)*
(Constant)	70.08	6.50		10.77	.000*		
Self-Judgment	.160	.273	.08	.587	.56		
Common Humanity	.336	.282	.15	1.191	.24	.19	3.65
Isolation	-.662	.253	-.30	-2.61	.01*		(003*)
Mindfulness	-.714	.260	-.31	-2.77	.01*		
Over-Identification	.040	.315	.016	.126	.90		
Self-Kindness	-.311	.267	-.14	-1.16	.25		

*p<.05; df =1, 98

Table 5
Regression Analysis with Self-Compassion as predictor of Procrastination in Last Born University Students (N = 100)

Scales	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*R²*	*F*	*Sig.*
Constant	65.45	7.47				
Self-Compassion	-.10	.09	-.11	.01	1.21	.28*

*p > .05; df = 1, 98

Table 6
Multiple Regression Analysis with Sub-scales of Self-Compassion as predictors of Procrastination in Last Born University Students (N = 100)

Variables	*B*	*SE*	*β*	*t*	*P*	*R²*	*F (Sig.)*
(Constant)	64.13	7.29		8.80	.000*		
Self-Judgment	-.445	.264	-.20	-1.69	.10		
Common Humanity	-.298	.289	-.12	-1.03	.31	.13	2.35
Isolation	.335	.263	.143	1.27	.21		(.037*)
Mindfulness	.372	.280	.15	1.33	.19		
Over-Identification	.234	.330	.08	.710	.48		
Self-Kindness	-.517	.234	-.24	-2.206	.03*		

*p<.05; *df* =1, 98

Table 7
Regression Analysis with Self-Compassion as predictor of Procrastination in University Students (N = 200)

Scales	*B*	*SE*	*β*	*R²*	*F*	*Sig.*
Constant	71.25	4.85				
Self-Compassion	-.19	.06	-.21	.05	9.34	.003*

*p < .05; *df* = 1, 98

Table 8
Multiple Regression Analysis with Sub-scales of Self-Compassion as predictors of Procrastination in University Students (N = 200)

Variables	*B*	*SE*	*β*	*t*	*P*	*R²*	*F (Sig.)*
Constant	71.57	4.90		14.62	.000*		
Self-Judgment	-1.63	.195	-.08	.838	.40		
Common Humanity	.085	.205	.04	.415	.68		
Isolation	-.232	.183	-.10	-1.27	.21	.07	2.36
Mindfulness	-.292	.192	-.12	-1.52	.13		(.032*)
Over-Identification	.013	.234	.01	.054	.96		
Self-Kindness	-.483	.181	-.22	-2.668	.01*		

*$p < .05$; *df* =1, 99

Table 9
Differences between First Born and Last Born University Student on Variable of Procrastination (N=200)

Variable	First Born (*n*=100)		Last Born (*n*=100)		*t*	*p*	Cohen's d
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
Procrastination	55.79	8.49	57.41	1.36	1.36	.17	.06

*$p > .05$; *df* = 198

DISCUSSION

The key findings regarding our first hypothesis are as such: self-compassion (Table 3) and only its isolation and mindfulness sub-scales (Table 4) significantly predicted procrastination among first born university students. Further, self-compassion failed to predict procrastination in last born university students (Table 5) however its subscale of self-kindness significantly predicted procrastination in last born university students (Table 6). The additional analysis has also been conducted on overall first and last born university students and it has been found that self-compassion (Table 7) and its sub-scale of self-kindness (Table 8) predicted procrastination in university students. The findings of these studies are consistent with previous studies (e.g., Sirois, 1994; Skender, 2011).

Procrastination seems to happen when we push too hard and marginalize parts of ourselves that need more care and connection. It has been seen that procrastination might increase levels of stress (Sirois, 1994). Treating oneself cruelly, with self-blame, disapproval, and a general lack of sympathy and recognition after malfunction to act may leads to the stress associated with procrastinating. Self-compassion is an adaptive practice that provides a buffer against negative reactions to self-relevant events. Self-compassion says that just like everyone else, you are imperfect. No matter whether you succeed or fail, try or don't try, you are worthy of love and respect just because you exist (Sirois, 1994).

First born children have desire to be right and precise. They are motivated to help and protect others. Middle children can easily be identified. They are in a process of race to catch the advancement of the other sibling and continually working to defeat their older siblings. The last born child may be considered as the "spoiled" baby. They may become the person in charge in the family and they suppose others to look after them (White, Campbell, & Stewart, 1995). Only children obtain all of the unshared care, attention and love from their parents and do not share it. These characteristics of birth order are related to procrastinate. Procrastination involves lack of motivation to perform a task within the expected time frame by knowing that one is expected to perform an activity. Procrastination is typically postponement of a chore until one faces stress about not having performed the action earlier (Senecal et al., 1995).

Further, our findings regarding second hypothesis are indicative of insignificant differences between first born and last born on procrastination.

These findings were consistent with existing research (Saleem & Rafique, 2012) who failed to find evidence for the relationship between procrastination and birth order. Adams (1998) compared the features of children in different birth orders. First and middle born children are hard-working whereas lastborn children are more social and having features to build social relationships. These characteristics are correlated with procrastination. In this study, data is collected from 200 students. It was found that there is no relationship between birth order and procrastination.

Conclusion

To sum up, the findings of our study indicate unique trends regarding association of self-compassion with procrastination. These findings are of vital significance as procrastination is a frequent and widespread phenomenon in academic context and has negative connotations for the academic life and future career development of the university students. The university counselor may design therapeutic interventions incorporating self-compassion which will help to reduce the practice of procrastination.

The study has some limitations. The sample was taken from universities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi only; in future the sample should be expanded to other provincial areas of Pakistan as well. In future studies, students enrolled in schools and colleges should also be included to explore further differences.

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