

# Impulsiveness and Fear of Failure as predictors of Academic Procrastination

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**Geeta Kumari**

*Research Scholar*

**Sonia Malik**

*Professor, Department of Psychology, MDU, Rohtak*

## Abstract

Academic goal in the life of students always play a stringent role in their career. Hence to reach a goal is affected not only by environmental factors but also by their mental frame. While keeping these ideas in mind the present study is an attempt to explore the level of academic procrastination and its antecedents related to personal dispositions. A purposive sample of 400 university postgraduates both male and female, within the age range of 21-27 years was drawn who voluntarily participated in the study and completed Academic Procrastination Scale, Barratt Impulsiveness Scale, and Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory. Data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics (mean and SD), Pearson correlation, and stepwise regression analysis. Findings revealed the moderate level in academic procrastination, normal level of impulsiveness and low level in fear of failure. Further correlation analysis indicated a significant positive correlation of impulsiveness and fear of failure with academic procrastination, thereby, indicating that as impulsiveness and fear of failure increased, the academic procrastination among students also increased. Impulsiveness emerged as a strong predictor of academic procrastination, as impulsive students procrastinate because they underestimate the satisfactory gain of achieving long term goals and hence postponement of desired action takes place in them. However fear of failure emerged as a weak predictor of academic procrastination.

**Keywords:** Personal dispositions, impulsiveness, fear of failure, academic procrastination.

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**Corresponding author:**

Geeta Kumari, Research Scholar

## Introduction

A postgraduate degree opens a new world of opportunities for an individual. It deepens knowledge in subject of interest, enhances basic skills and improves career prospectus. According to All India Survey of Higher Education (2019) 10.81% of the students are enrolled in postgraduate courses in India. Master's courses here are generally taught at universities. It is the most memorable and charming phase in the life of a student. They enjoy more independence and freedom but at the same time university could be academically demanding and challenging for them. Students find themselves juggling between assignments, projects, readings and attending classes. They encounter numerous problems to complete academic tasks and academic procrastination is one of those. Senecal, Koestner and Vallerand (1995) defined academic procrastination as an unnecessary act of delay in starting or finishing a piece of work or completing an already started task on or before time. "Solomon and Rothblum" (1984) reported that students procrastinate on administrative chores and attending classes. Onwuegbuzie (1999) found that postgraduate students postpone reading weekly assignments, put off writing a term paper to last minute, and delay studying for exams. A study conducted by Sichan. He (2017) revealed that nearly 86% of the university students experience academic procrastination from 'sometimes' to 'always', 12% and 36% of the students stated the delay in academic tasks as 'always' and 'very often' respectively. And at the Master's level 43% of students reported 'sometimes' to undergo academic procrastination sometimes during their academic span.

Occasionally students spend majority of their daily time in more fun activities like hanging out with friends, watching TV, scrolling down social media on their smart phones or tablets which leads to less time available for more important academic task e.g. studying for an upcoming exam, completing assignments or projects etc. Pychyl, Coplan & Reid (2002) suggested that everyday students spent one-third of their time in other activities than academic tasks. Muslikah, Mulawarman, & Andriyani (2018) indicated the use of social media to be negatively related to academic procrastination among students. As academic procrastination is associated with negative academic results, as well as missing assignment submitting deadlines, delay in carrying out self-paced quizzes, low grades, and course withdrawal (Beswick, Rothblum, & Mann, 1988).

McCown & Johnson (1991) stated that, if procrastination became chronic or dysfunctional it could hamper the ability to perform day to day tasks. It gave rise to embarrassment and inferiority complex among students as it curtails confidence and their eagerness to finishing the task (Steel, 2007). It also results in improper sleep, unhealthy diet and exercise habits (Sirois and Pychyl, 2002) and increases stress, worry, and fear leading to an unhappy or uncomfortable life (Hoover, 2005). According to Sichan. He (2017) 90% of Students at

Master's level feels anxious or disturbed upon delaying their academic tasks and 46% of students reported stress as the key cause for their procrastination on academic jobs. However, Lack of self-discipline, overconfidence, language barriers, indolence, sickness, confusion above values and goals, lack of guidance, too much internet use and negative influence of peers are reported as reasons for academic procrastination by students at the postgraduate level. Several different models of procrastination are proposed in field of psychology from behavioral operant conditioning to meta cognitive perspective. According to conceptual model of procrastination, personality factors such as sensation seeking, conscientiousness, self-esteem, impulsiveness and fear of failure plays a prominent role in procrastination (Procee et al., 2013).

In general, procrastination appears to occur from an impulsive tendency of doing tasks that feels easy-peasy and provide short term and instant gratification. Impulsiveness and procrastination appears to be two different aspects of same problem of not doing desired task. Although impulsivity is an immediate action where as procrastination is a delay of action. Quarton's (1992) qualitative analysis of procrastination study reported it as impulsive and unintentional. Moeller et al. (2001) defined impulsivity as a "propensity towards hasty, spontaneous reactions to internal or external stimuli without giving much attention to aversive outcomes due to these reactions for the individual or others." The fundamental features of impulsiveness are propensity to execute premature plans, struggling to stay at a task or inhibiting actions, and tendency to seek instant gratification at the cost of long term benefits (Schachar, Tannock, and Logan, 1993). Researchers reported a positive relationship between impulsivity and procrastination in their studies (e.g. Ferrari, 2000; Bhutto, Mohsin and Niazi, 2011). Steel (2007) found an average correlation between impulsiveness and procrastination in the meta-analytic and theoretical review.

Fear of failure is an irrational fear of failing. Conroy, Metzler and Hofer (2003) defined fear of failure as "a tendency to appraise threat and feel anxious during situations that involve the possibility of failing". Failing is part of academic life. It helps in the growth and development of a student for future and real life challenges but a consistent and harsh criticism could develop shame and humiliation in them. To avoid these unpleasant feelings students tend to postpone tasks on which they think they could not perform better. The susceptibility to avoid failure encourages individuals to protect themselves against their low self-esteem, loss of social respect, and fear of embarrassment (Birney et al., 1969). Kachgal, Hansen & Nutter (2001) reported that greater than 20% of students agreed on items related to fear of failure as a major reason for procrastination. University students reported fear of failure, task aversiveness and laziness as major reasons for procrastination in academic settings (Solomon and Rothblum, 1984).

To date, limited empirical research exists on the phenomenon of academic procrastination, impulsiveness and fear of failure among Indian university students. An integrated investigation of these factors in a single research may prove beneficial about the nature of the relationship between these variables.

### **Objectives**

- To assess and explore the relationship of academic procrastination with impulsiveness and fear of failure.
- To find out the predicting power of impulsiveness and fear of failure with regard to academic procrastination.

### **Method**

#### **Design**

A correlational design was used in the study.

#### **Sample**

A purposive sample of 400 postgraduate students both male and female in the age range of 21-27 years from various departments of Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak, Haryana was taken.

#### **Tools**

##### **1) Academic Procrastination Scale ( McCloskey .J.D., 2011)**

It consists of 25 items to be responded on 5 point Likert scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Range of scores ranges from 25-125. The higher scores, higher the procrastination. Internal consistency of scale is 0.94.

##### **2) Barratt Impulsiveness Scale (BIS-11; Patton, J. H., Stanford, M. S. and Barratt, E. S, 1995)**

It consists of 30 statements to be responded on 4 point Likert scale from 'rarely/never' to 'almost always/ always.' It measures impulsiveness on 3 facets: attention, motor and non-planning impulsiveness. The scale exhibits good validity (Standford et al., 2009) and reliability of scales ranges from 0.79 to 0.83.

##### **3) The Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory (PFAI; Conroy, D.E, 2002)**

It consists of 25 items to be responded on 5 point scale, responses varying from 'do not believe at all' to 'believe 100% of the time'. It consists of five domains: (a) fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment, (b) fear of devaluing one's self-estimate, (c) fear of having an uncertain future, (d) fear of important others losing interest, and (e) fear of upsetting important others. Reliability of subscales ranges from .49 to .87.

## Procedure

Students were approached from different departments (sciences, social sciences, and humanities) of university the M.D.U, Rohtak. A rapport was established with them and information about the study was given. After their consent, hard copies of the questionnaire were handed. All the instructions about the scales were conveyed. Participants filled the questionnaire according to given instruction in single seating. Further scoring was done as per norms of each scale/questionnaire and data was put to statistical analysis by using SPSS 25.

## Results and Discussion

In order to attain 1st objective of the study i.e. "To assess and explore the relationship of academic procrastination with impulsiveness (overall and its various facets) and fear of failure (overall and its various domains)", descriptive statistic (mean and SD) and Pearson correlation analysis was carried out and has been shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Mean, SD, and Correlation of Academic Procrastination with Impulsiveness (overall and its various facets) and Fear of Failure (overall and its various domains)*

Variables	AP	Im	FF	AI	MI	NPI	FSE	FDSE	FUF	FIOLI	FUIO
AP	1	.373**	.244**	.296**	.254**	.247**	.242**	.162**	.195**	.218**	.183**
Im		1	.213**	.717**	.696**	.701**	.198**	.153**	.239**	.140**	.181**
FF			1	.165**	.161**	.126*	.746**	.685**	.666**	.674**	.707**
AI				1	.329**	.308**	.194**	.180**	.184**	.083	.120*
MI					1	.112*	.138**	.064	.167**	.133**	.164**
NPI						1	.100*	.097	.158**	.077	.098
FSE							1	.526**	.446**	.588**	.548**
FDSE								1	.464**	.370**	.431**
FUF									1	.391**	.499**
FIOLI										1	.446**
FUIO											1
Mean	72.47	66.40	-1.30	18.49	24.20	23.72	-.073	-.34	-.15	-.14	.03
SD	13.44	8.84	.72	3.42	4.51	4.64	.86	.96	.87	.99	.82

Note: \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01

Source: Compiled by Author

AP (academic procrastination), Im (impulsiveness (overall)), FF (fear of failure), AI (attentional impulsiveness), MI (motor impulsiveness), NPI (non-planning impulsiveness), FSE (Experiencing Shame and Embarrassment), FDSE (Fear of Devaluing One's Self Estimate), FUF (Fear of Uncertain Future), FIOI (Fear of Important Others Losing Interest), and FUIO (Fear of Upsetting Important Others).

It is apparent from the Table 1, that postgraduate students scored 72.47 mean scores on academic procrastination thereby, indicating the moderate tendency towards academic procrastination. It may be due to their age and education as students age and level of education increased their tendency of procrastination decreased (Sichan He, 2017; Svartdal et.al., 2016; Steel and Ferrari, 2013). As far as 1st objective is concerned students who had scored 66.40 mean scores on impulsiveness thereby revealing normal tendency on impulsiveness (overall). It may be attributed to their high emotional intelligence at this stage of life. Further, a look at the various facets of impulsiveness, it is found that maximum impulsiveness is found in the motor impulsiveness followed by non-planning impulsiveness and least in attentional impulsiveness, thereby, revealing the fact that they used to act without thinking and prior forethought resulting in quick decision making The findings of the present results are in line with Standfort et. al. (2009), who also reported normal levels of impulsiveness.

In order to execute the later part of the 1st objective, students scored -.1304 mean scores on Fear of Failure (overall) (Table 1) thereby revealing the low level of fear of failure as experienced by them. The students at the master's level become more independent and can meet their day-to-day academic challenges by themselves (Alkhazaleh and Mahasneh, 2016).

Further in order to explore the relationship of academic procrastination with impulsiveness and fear of failure, a look at Table 1, reveals that academic procrastination has been found to be positively significantly ( $0.373, p < 0.01$ ) correlated with Impulsiveness (overall), though magnitude appears to be of low moderate level. A further look at Table 1 indicates that various facets of impulsiveness such as attentional impulsiveness, motor impulsiveness and non planning impulsiveness have been found to be positively significantly correlated with academic procrastination as  $r( .296^{**}, .254^{**}$  and  $.247^{**}$  respectively). These findings highlighted the fact that as impulsiveness increased so increased academic procrastination. The present findings corroborated the previous findings of Steel (2007) and Bhutto et al. (2011).

As far as the relationship between fear of failure and academic procrastination is concerned, Table 1 reveals a low positive significant ( $0.244, p < 0.01$ ) correlation between academic procrastination and fear of failure (overall). The results are in agreement with previous studies of Solomon and Rothblum (1984), Burka and Yemen (2008) and Zarrin, Gracia and Paixão (2020). A further look at Table 1 connotes a positive significant but weak correlation between academic procrastination and various domains of fear of failure. The maximum correlation is found with experiencing shame and embarrassment  $r (.242)$ , followed by fear of important others losing interest  $r (.218)$ , fear of uncertain future  $r (.195)$ , and fear

of upsetting important others  $r (.183)$  and least with fear of devaluing one's self estimate  $r (.162)$ . Therefore, fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment matters much for their academic procrastination. It appears to be associated with aversive and threatening consequences such as shame and embarrassment in evaluative situations. To avoid negative and overwhelming feelings of shame and embarrassment upon failing, students tend to procrastinate in order to avoid self blame for their proposed failure. In this way they protect their self image as well as self worth (Covington, 1992).

Stepwise multiple regression analysis was carried out to meet 2<sup>nd</sup> objective i.e. "To find out the predicting power of impulsiveness and fear of failure with regard to academic procrastination" which has been displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Stepwise Multiple Regression analysis of Academic Procrastination on Impulsiveness (overall) and Fear of Failure (overall)*

Model	Dependent variable	Independent variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Std. error of the estimate	Standardized Beta	F	Significant level
1.	Academic Procrastination	Impulsiveness	.373	.139	12.484	.373	64.430	.001
2.		Impulsiveness	.410	.168	12.291	.337	40.026	.001
		Fear of Failure				.173		

*Source: Compiled by Author*

It is clear from Table 2 that, in model 1 impulsiveness (overall) emerged as a robust predictor ( $F=64.430$   $p<.001$ ) of academic procrastination. The R square value i.e.  $.139$  indicates that 13.9 percent variance in academic procrastination is accounted by impulsiveness (overall), whereas  $\beta$  value i.e.  $.373$  depicts that 37.3% increased in academic procrastination tendency with one unit increased in impulsiveness (overall). Thus, it may be inferred that impulsiveness played a pivotal role in determining academic procrastination which manifestly led to comfort by escaping from so called academic stress. The present findings supported the previous findings of Steel (2007) and Bhutto et al. (2011).

Furthermore, in model 2, fear of failure also emerged as a significant predictor ( $F=40.026$ ,  $p<.001$ ) of academic procrastination. Where the value of R square ( $.168$ ) indicates that both impulsiveness (overall) as well as fear of failure (overall) are accounted for 16.8% variance in academic procrastination, while corresponding  $\beta$  value ( $.173$ ) depicts that with

one unit increased in fear of failure led to 17.3% increase in academic procrastination. The results were in line with previous studies of Solomon and Rothblum (1984), Burka and Yemen (2008) and Zarrin, Gracia and Paixão (2020). Fear of failure facilitated procrastination may be due to failure to come up with the desired standards set by concerned person or it may be attributed to one's past experiences. Thus, procrastination serves as a protective shield for their self-worth which appears to be threatened (Covington, 1992).

After finding impulsiveness (overall) and fear of failure (overall), it appears to be essential to explore and highlight the role of various facets and domains of impulsiveness and fear of failure respectively.

Stepwise multiple regression analysis was carried out with various facets of impulsiveness and various domains of fear of failure to find predictors of academic procrastination. The results are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Stepwise regression analysis of Academic Procrastination on domains of Impulsiveness and Fear of Failure*

Model	Dependent variable	Independent variable	R	R square	Std. error of the estimate	Standardized coefficients Beta	F	Sig. level
1.	Academic Procrastination	AI	.296	.087	12.856	.296	38.089	.001
2.		AI	.354	.125	12.603	.276	28.389	.001
		FIOLI				.195		
3.	Academic Procrastination	AI	.386	.149	12.448	.230	23.048	.001
		FIOLI				.187		
		NPI				.161		
4.	Academic Procrastination	AI	.412	.169	12.311	.181	20.139	.001
		FIOLI				.170		
		NPI				.161		
		MI				.154		

*Source: Compiled by Author*

Excluded variables: Experiencing Shame and Embarrassment (FSE), Fear of Devaluing One's Self Estimate (FDSE), Fear of Uncertain Future (FUF) and Fear of Upsetting Important Others (FUIO)



It is apparent from Table 3, that out of 3 facets of impulsiveness all the three facets (i.e. attentional impulsiveness, non-planning impulsiveness and motor impulsiveness) emerged as predictors of academic procrastination, whereas, only one domain of fear of failure (i.e. fear of important others losing interest) emerged as predictor of academic procrastination.

Thus, findings indicated that attentional impulsiveness played a significant role in academic procrastination followed by fear of important others losing interest. As Onwuegbuzie (2000) reported that academic procrastination due to fear of failure may be attributed to self-oriented as well as socially prescribed perfection. Socially prescribed perfectionist believes that significant others such as friends and family hold unrealistic standards for them, rigorously evaluate them, and pressured them to be perfect (Hewitt and Flett, 1991). Students who fear that they would not be able to perform well on academic task believe that if they fail significant people in their lives would show less interest and attention towards them. To protect their social devaluation they tend to delay task so that they can inculcate lack of time for their failure on task rather than their inability to perform.

The emergence of non-planning impulsiveness as predictor of academic procrastination thereby indicates that planning in one's life plays a primary role to have a success in life. For instance in the current era where students are generally engage in hub of activities at the same time resulting in non-planning and believe in spontaneous actions which later on trigger fear of failure resulting in shift from one course to another way frequently.

From the present study it is clear that impulsiveness as well as fear of failure play significant role in academic procrastination. Workshops and intervention programs could be organized by universities to create awareness among students about academic procrastination in order to protect them from its negative consequences on their personal, professional, and social lives.

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