

Exploring the Interplay Between Self-Esteem, Self-Handicapping and Procrastination Among College Students

Ritu Singh^{1*}, Arati pandey¹, Satyendra Mani Vikram²

¹Department of Psychology B.R.D.B.D PG College, Ashram Barhaj, Deoria Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gorakhpur University, Utter Pradesh, India.

²SSB PG Colleges, JNCU Ballia, Utter Pradesh, India.

ARTICLE INFO

*Correspondence:

Ritu Singh
ritusinghrss@gmail.
com

Department of
Psychology B.R.D.B.D PG
College, Ashram Barhaj,
Deoria Deen Dayal
Upadhyay Gorakhpur
University, Utter
Pradesh, India.

Dates:

Received: 24-11-2024

Accepted: 24-01-2025

Published: 30-01-2025

Keywords:

Self-Esteem, Self-
Handicapping,
Procrastination

How to Cite:

Singh, R., Pandey, A.,
Vikram, S.M. (2024).
Exploring the Interplay
Between Self-Esteem,
Self-Handicapping and
Procrastination Among
College Students. *Mind
and Society*, 13(4): 59-65.
doi: 10.56011/mind-
mri-134-20248

Abstract

This study examines the relationships between self-handicapping, procrastination, and self-esteem among college students. A total of 400 students (200 males and 200 females) aged 18–25 years from colleges in Varanasi participated in the research. Utilizing a correlational design, the study employed the Self-Handicapping Scale (SHS), the General Procrastination Scale (GP), and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) to assess the constructs. The findings revealed significant negative correlations between self-esteem and self-handicapping ($r = -0.309$, $p < 0.01$) as well as between self-esteem and procrastination ($r = -0.111$, $p < 0.05$). However, no significant correlation was observed between self-handicapping and procrastination ($r = -0.066$). Regression analyses further demonstrated that self-handicapping significantly predicted self-esteem, accounting for 9.5% of the variance ($\beta = -0.309$, $p < 0.001$), while procrastination explained only 1.2% of the variance in self-esteem ($\beta = -0.111$, $p = 0.026$). These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how avoidance behaviors impact self-esteem and highlight the importance of targeted interventions to enhance resilience and self-worth among young adults.

INTRODUCTION

Self-Handicapping

Self-handicapping is a behavioral and cognitive technique people employ to safeguard their self-worth when they expect to do poorly or fail (Berglas & Jones, 1978). By erecting or exaggerating barriers that could prevent success, people provide themselves an automatic justification for failing and evade dangers to their self-esteem. Failure can be attributed to external reasons, such time constraints or personal challenges, rather than internal deficiencies, like incapacity or intelligence. Achieving achievement in spite of a disability, however,

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

could be seen as even more remarkable because the person overcame additional obstacles.

Self-handicapping behavior is associated with motivational and cognitive processes. Cognitive aspects include the person's view of their own talents and their apprehension about showing any possible shortcomings. Maintaining one's self-esteem and avoiding shame or embarrassment are two motivational considerations. According to Rhodewalt (1994), those who are prone to self-handicapping frequently have low self-esteem and are more inclined to use this tactic in situations that carry significant stakes or evaluations.

Self-handicapping habits can take many different forms, including substance abuse, procrastination, and inadequate task preparation. It is particularly common in people who find themselves in circumstances where they are under pressure to achieve, like their jobs or their studies. Long-term, the phenomena may be maladaptive because it perpetuates a loop of inadequate planning, subpar performance, and self-blame, all of which feed low self-esteem (Ferrari & Tice, 2000).

Self-handicapping is actually ineffective, even though it is intended to be self-defense. The exact actions meant to protect one's self-esteem can instead work against one's chances of success, resulting in a persistent reinforcement of negative self-perceptions. Self-handicapping has been repeatedly linked in research to detrimental effects, such as worsened academic performance, lower productivity, and elevated stress (Zuckerman et al., 1998). This strategy may provide momentary respite from stress and worry, but in the long run, it obstructs real development and success. Therefore, addressing self-handicapping's long-term effects on self-esteem and personal growth requires knowledge of the mechanics underlying the practice.

Procrastination

One common occurrence is procrastination, which is the deliberate postponement of crucial duties even when one is aware that doing so will have unfavorable effects. About 20% of adults in the general population are thought to procrastinate on a regular basis; in academic or professional contexts, this percentage is much higher (Steel, 2007). One common

way that people self-handicap is by procrastinating, seeing the delay as a justification for possible failure or subpar work. When people procrastinate, they can blame any unfavorable results on a lack of time or preparation rather than on their own shortcomings (Schouwenburg, 2004).

Procrastination is closely associated with a number of emotional and cognitive characteristics, such as perfectionism, limited self-regulation, and fear of failure, according to psychological study on the topic (Sirois & Pychyl, 2013). Procrastinating adults frequently express significant levels of tension, worry, and performance dissatisfaction. Moreover, procrastination has been linked to worse health outcomes, decreased life satisfaction, and worse academic or professional performance (Van Eerde, 2003). It is a maladaptive coping strategy that can exacerbate cycles of shame, guilt, and avoidance while also undermining the person's feeling of self-efficacy.

Procrastination, according to researchers like Tice and Baumeister (1997), is frequently associated with impulsiveness, when people put short-term mood preservation (such as partaking in enjoyable activities) ahead of long-term goal attainment. Procrastination in this situation offers a momentary reprieve from the stress of an upcoming work, but it makes matters worse by adding to the time limitations and tension as due dates get near. This can eventually affect one's self-esteem and general well-being by resulting in a decreased sense of control over one's time and obligations.

Cognitive distortions like exaggerated expectations and overestimation of the amount of time needed to do a task also contribute to procrastination. People that procrastinate could be overconfident in their capacity to do work under pressure, which could result in persistent delays and subpar performance (Steel, 2007). Procrastination has also been connected to a fear of criticism or failure, when people put off chores to preserve their self-worth. They avoid facing the potential that they might fall short of expectations, both their own and those of others, by delaying duties (Ferrari & Scher, 2000).

It is essential to comprehend the connection between procrastination and self-esteem in order to create solutions that work. Procrastination has a

detrimental effect on wellbeing and productivity, therefore addressing its root causes such as low self-esteem and fear of failing can help people break the avoidance cycle and develop better self-regulation.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is a crucial component of psychological health and is defined as an individual's subjective assessment of their own value. According to Rosenberg (1965), low self-esteem is linked to a number of bad consequences, such as depression, anxiety, and social disengagement, whereas high self-esteem is linked to positive outcomes including improved mental health, increased resilience, and life satisfaction. Adults' self-esteem is impacted by a variety of things, such as their social connections, personal accomplishments, and their capacity to live up to their own or society's standards.

Studies repeatedly demonstrate that maladaptive behaviors like procrastination and self-handicapping are more common among people with poor self-esteem (Baumeister, Tice&Hutton, 2003). These actions act as defense mechanisms, enabling people to externalize failure and evade the prospect that their performance is a reflection of their skills. This coping mechanism has a price, too, as it feeds a vicious cycle of low self-esteem, poor performance, and even more self-eroding. According to Bandura (1997), people who have poor self-esteem might not have the courage to take on difficult assignments or make lofty objectives, which could result in a self-fulfilling prophesy of underperformance.

Self-esteem also affects how people react to criticism and setbacks. While those with low self-esteem are more inclined to see failure as a reflection of their inherent value, those with high self-esteem are more likely to see it as a chance for personal development and education (Crocker & Park, 2004). This disparity in interpretation can have a substantial effect on a person's drive, perseverance, and general success in a variety of spheres of life, such as employment, education, and interpersonal relationships.

The connection between procrastination and self-esteem is very significant. Although some people put things off because they don't think they're worth it, procrastinating itself might make

them feel less valuable. Procrastinators frequently feel guilty and ashamed about putting off crucial chores, which gradually undermines their self-confidence (Ferrari, 2001). Therefore, it may be challenging to break the cycle of procrastination and low self-esteem without focused therapies that deal with the behavioral as well as the emotional components of the issue.

In order to promote wellbeing and personal development, it is essential to develop self-esteem. Procrastination and self-handicapping are examples of maladaptive behaviors that have been demonstrated to decrease when interventions that foster self-awareness, goal-setting, and positive self-evaluation are implemented. It is crucial to comprehend the intricate relationship among procrastination, self-handicapping, and self-esteem in order to create all-encompassing techniques that assist folks in reaching their objectives, both personal and professional.

Objectives

- To investigate the relationship between self-handicapping, procrastination and self-esteem among college students.
- To find out the contribution of self-handicapping and procrastination in self-esteem among college students.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 400 participants(aged between 18-25 yearswith a mean age of 22.54 years) from different colleges of Varanasi district of Uttar Pradesh, India have participated in the study. There were 200 male and 200 female participants in the sample. They were in their first year of graduation to final year of post-graduation degree program.

Tools

Self-handicapping scale (SHS)

The Hindi version of self-handicapping scale (SHS) created by Sudand Sujata (2003) was utilized. The participants required to answer on a six-point rating

scale, ranging from “very much,” to “disagree very much”. There are 25 items in the questionnaire. The SHS has been used in extensive group testing sessions and has demonstrated satisfactory test-retest reliability at one month, $r = 0.74$) and internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha, $r = 0.79$). A composite of SHS distinctive and convergent validity is provided by data gathered from multiple samples.

General procrastination (GP)

Procrastination was measured using the General Procrastination Scale developed Lay (1986). It has 20-items. The Hindi translation of this scale was used. There are 10 reverse-scored items on this scale and the sum of the scores results in a mean score. A high mean score denotes a high level of procrastination, whereas a low mean score denotes a low level. For this scale, the Cronbach’s alpha was 0.73.

Self esteem (RSE)

Morris Rosenberg developed the self-report Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) in 1965 as a tool to gauge a person’s general feeling of self-worth. With 10 items, it employs a 4-point Likert scale that goes from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree.” In the range of 0 to 30, scores between 15 and 25 are regarded as normal, while scores below 15 indicate low self-esteem. The scale has great test-retest reliability (range from 0.63 to 0.91) and high reliability (internal consistency of 0.77).

Procedure

After providing their written and verbal consent, participants received the demographic form and study measures. We contacted each participant, provided them with a questionnaire, and strictly adhered to study ethics. We used a standardized scoring process and statistically examined the data using regression and correlation analysis.

RESULTS

This study was correlational research in nature. The product-moment correlation was used to look into the connections between self-handicapping, procrastination, and self-esteem. Linear regression analysis was also used to look into the predicted power of self-handicapping in the prediction of self

esteem and also procrastination in the prediction of self esteem.

The results showed (Table 1) a negative correlation between self-esteem and self-handicapping ($r = -.309$, $p < .01$). This indicates that lower self-esteem is linked to increased self-handicapping actions. Additionally, there was a negative association between procrastination and self-esteem ($r = -.111$, $p < .05$), suggesting that procrastination was inversely correlated with self-esteem. Furthermore, procrastination and self-handicapping had a negative correlation ($r = -.066$), although this relationship was not statistically significant.

The findings of the simple linear regression analysis are shown in Table 2. Self-esteem is entered as criterion variable and self-handicapping as a predictor variable. Self-handicapping was found to be a significant predictor of self-esteem, explaining almost 9.5% of the variation in self-esteem. The negative beta value ($\beta = -.309$, $p = 0.000$) suggested that lower levels of self-esteem are linked to higher levels of self-handicapping.

The findings of the simple linear regression analysis are shown in Table 3. Self-esteem is entered as criterion variable and procrastination as a predictor variable. Procrastination was found to be a significant predictor of self-esteem, explaining around 1.2% of the variation in self-esteem. Higher levels of procrastination are linked to poorer levels of self-esteem, according to the negative beta value ($\beta = -.111$, $p = 0.026$).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to look into the connections between procrastination, self-esteem, and self-handicapping the college students. Results showed that self-handicapping was negatively correlated with self-esteem, implying that people who regularly engage in self-handicapping behaviours typically have lower confidence and self-worth. This is consistent with studies that demonstrate how internalizing perceived failures through self-handicapping can lower self-esteem. In contrast, procrastination and self-handicapping have a modest, non-significant association. There is a small negative link between procrastination and self-esteem, suggesting that procrastinators may suffer from mild

Table 1: Correlation between Self-Handicapping, Procrastination and Self-Esteem

	<i>Self-Handicapping</i>	<i>Procrastination</i>	<i>Self-Esteem</i>
Self-Handicapping	1	-.066	-.309**
Procrastination		1	-.111*
Self-Esteem			1

*p < .05, **p < .01

Table 2: Self-Handicapping as predictor of Self-Esteem

<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>R</i> ² change	<i>F</i> change	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Beta</i> (β)	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
.309	.095	.095	42.126	.000	-.309	-6.490	.000

Table 3: Procrastination as predictor of Self-Esteem

<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>R</i> ² change	<i>F</i> change	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Beta</i> (β)	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
.111	.012	.012	4.987	.026	-.111	-2.233	.026

declines in self-esteem as a result of the shame or disappointment that comes with delaying tasks. While procrastination and self-handicapping are inversely correlated with self-worth, self-handicapping seems to have a stronger overall effect on self-esteem.

Self-handicapping actions have been demonstrated to have long-lasting detrimental impacts on self-worth, such as erecting barriers to escape full responsibility for possible failures. A common reason of this phenomenon is individuals internalizing their failures, which lowers their self-esteem (Hirt et al., 2000; Akın & Akın, 2015). Self-handicapping may serve as a short-term self-image shield, but as people grow more conscious of their persistent avoidance behaviors, their confidence and sense of self-worth decline (Rhodewalt, 2008). Furthermore, studies by Conroy and Elliot (2003) show that self-handicappers have higher levels of anxiety and humiliation, which can reinforce poor self-perceptions and worsen low self-esteem. According to a recent study by Uysal and Knee (2020), those who self-handicap regularly has an external locus of control, which makes them more prone to making excuses. Overall, because self-handicapping reinforces negative self-perceptions more consistently than procrastination, it seems to have a much bigger effect on self-esteem. The results of this study indi-

cate that self-handicapping and procrastination are not necessarily related.

Procrastination is frequently caused by impulsivity or time management issues, not the self-esteem-protective drive that characterizes self-handicapping, according to studies (Steel, 2007; Ferrari & Tice, 2000). Furthermore, according to some recent research, procrastination may be caused by perfectionism or a fear of making mistakes, which can occasionally result in self-handicapping behaviors but are typically distinct problems (Flett et al., 2012; Dewitte & Schouwenburg, 2002). This contrast was investigated in a study by Schraw et al. (2007), which found that those who procrastinate because of perfectionism may be less affected by the undermining effect of self-worth that is linked to self-handicapping because their motivation is primarily high standards rather than fear of failure.

Procrastination can therefore sometimes function on its own, most likely because it is linked to a number of underlying motivators other than preserving one's sense of self. Procrastination has a moderate but negative relationship with self-esteem, which is consistent with earlier studies showing that, although procrastination can lower self-esteem to some extent, the effects are typically less severe than those of self-handicapping. Particularly if procrastination becomes a chronic problem,

it has been demonstrated that it causes feelings of shame, irritation, and self-disappointment, all of which can progressively degrade self-esteem (Steel, 2007; Blunt & Pychyl, 2000). But while procrastination frequently entails external or situational demands (like deadlines), its effect on self-esteem is typically context-dependent and does not always result in a decline in self-worth over the long term (Svartdal et al., 2020). As an instance, Ferrari et al. (2005) found that procrastinators may have self-esteem swings depending on results (such as finishing a task or failing at it), in contrast to self-handicappers who have more persistently poor self-esteem because of their avoidance habits. This distinction explains why procrastination typically has a less negative effect on self-esteem than self-handicapping.

The results of this study add to the increasing amount of research indicating that self-handicapping and procrastination both have a detrimental effect on self-esteem, albeit in different ways. Because self-handicapping is motivated by self-protection, it seems to have a larger correlation with problems with self-esteem and frequently causes people to turn to excuses rather than build resilience (Zuckerman et al., 1998; Urdan & Midgley, 2001). However, as procrastination's causes are frequently contextual rather than firmly based in self-worth, its indirect impact on self-esteem suggests it would be easier to control.

Future studies could look at these activities in various demographic groups, analyzing variables like personality traits, age, and cultural background to comprehend their diverse effects on self-esteem. Additionally, self-handicapping therapies may be particularly helpful for people with low self-esteem because they can promote resilience and self-compassion, which lessens the need for self-defeating behaviors (Neff, Hsieh, & Dejjitterat, 2005; Akin, 2012).

CONCLUSION

The connections between procrastination, self-esteem, and self-handicapping are significantly clarified by this study. Self-handicapping is more common among people who use it as a method, perhaps as a way to protect their self-esteem from potential failure. The results show a positive relationship between procrastination and self-handicapping.

Additionally, self-esteem and self-handicapping are negatively correlated, which means that those who self-handicap tend to have lower self-esteem, which makes it more difficult for them to maintain self-control and remain in the present. Similarly, procrastination and self-esteem are negatively correlated, suggesting that procrastinators have a lower capacity for present-moment awareness, which may exacerbate stress and task-related management issues.

REFERENCES

- Akin, A. (2012). The relationships between Internet addiction, subjective vitality, and subjective happiness. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 15(8), 404-410.
- Akin, A., & Akin, U. (2015). Self-handicapping: Links to self-esteem and procrastination. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 60, 85-90.
- Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy: The exercise of control (Vol. 604). Freeman.
- Baumeister, R. F., Tice, D. M., & Hutton, D. G. (2003). Self-presentational motivations and personality differences in self-esteem. *Journal of Personality*, 71(5), 879-897.
- Berglas, S., & Jones, E. E. (1978). Drug choice as a self-handicapping strategy in response to noncontingent success. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36(4), 405-417.
- Blunt, A., & Pychyl, T. (2000). Task aversiveness and procrastination: A multi-dimensional approach to task aversiveness across stages of personal projects. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 28(1), 153-167.
- Conroy, D. E., & Elliot, A. J. (2003). Fear of failure and achievement goals in sport: Addressing the issue of the chicken and the egg. *Anxiety, Stress, and Coping*, 16(3), 271-289.
- Crocker, J., & Park, L. E. (2004). The costly pursuit of self-esteem. *Psychological Bulletin*, 130(3), 392.
- Dewitte, S., & Schouwenburg, H. C. (2002). Procrastination, temptations, and incentives: The struggle between the present and the future in procrastinators and the punctual. *European Journal of Personality*, 16(6), 469-489.
- Ferrari, J. R. (2001). Procrastination as self-regulation failure of performance: Effects of cognitive load, self-awareness, and time limits on "working best under pressure." *European Journal of Personality*, 15(5), 391-406.
- Ferrari, J. R., & Tice, D. M. (2000). Procrastination as a self-handicap for men and women: A task-avoidance strategy in a laboratory setting. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 34(1), 73-83.
- Flett, G. L., Stainton, M., Hewitt, P. L., Sherry, S. B., & Lay, C. (2012). Procrastination automatic thoughts as a personality construct: An analysis of the procrastinatory cognitions inventory. *Journal of Rational-Emotive &*

- Cognitive-Behavior Therapy*, 30, 223-236.
- Hirt, E. R., McCrea, S. M., & Boris, H. I. (2000). Self-handicapping in evaluative settings: The role of appraisals and attributions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 62(2), 212-217.
- Neff, K. D., Hsieh, Y. P., & DeJitterat, K. (2005). Self-compassion, achievement goals, and coping with academic failure. *Self and identity*, 4(3), 263-287.
- Rhodewalt, F. (2008). The role of self-esteem in the dynamics of self-handicapping. *Journal of Personality*, 68(5), 773-800.
- Rosenberg, M. J. (1965). When dissonance fails: On eliminating evaluation apprehension from attitude measurement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1(1), 28.
- Schouwenburg, H. C. (2004). Procrastination in Academic Settings: General Introduction.
- Sirois, F., & Pychyl, T. (2013). Procrastination and the priority of short-term mood regulation: Consequences for future self. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 7(2), 115-127.
- Steel, P. (2007). The nature of procrastination: A meta-analytic and theoretical review of quintessential self-regulatory failure. *Psychological Bulletin*, 133(1), 65-94.
- Svartdal, F., Dahl, T. I., Gamst-Klaussen, T., Koppenborg, M., & Klingsieck, K. B. (2020). How study environments foster academic procrastination: Overview and recommendations. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 540910.
- Tice, D. M., & Baumeister, R. F. (1997). Longitudinal study of procrastination, performance, stress, and health: The costs and benefits of dawdling. *Psychological science*, 8(6), 454-458.
- Urda, T., & Midgley, C. (2001). Academic self-handicapping: What we know, what more there is to learn. *Educational Psychology Review*, 13, 115-138.
- Uysal, A., & Knee, C. R. (2020). Self-handicapping and its consequences: The impact of fear of failure on self-handicapping and self-esteem. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 55(6), 686-690.
- Van Eerde, W. (2003). A meta-analytically derived nomological network of procrastination. *Personality and individual differences*, 35(6), 1401-1418.
- Zuckerman, M., Kieffer, S. C., & Knee, C. R. (1998). Consequences of self-handicapping: Effects on coping, academic performance, and adjustment. *Journal of personality and Social Psychology*, 74(6), 1619.