

CHAPTER

4

PERFECTIONISM AND STRESS

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4.1 INTRODUCTION

Undeniably, the COVID-19 Pandemic is known worldwide as a newly announced and discovered infectious coronavirus that transmits from an individual to another person through or via droplets (Flett & Hewitt, 2020a). The COVID-19 Pandemic has resulted in disadvantages, creating a situation that has significantly increased stress and anxiety worldwide. With the current circumstances that contribute to a sense of isolation and helplessness, everyone is at risk of experiencing primary stress. At their best, someone with a perfectionist personality can be problematic. Perfectionism is a deeply ingrained personality trait, with severe perfectionists more likely to be stiff and unyielding. One of the dangers of having a strong desire to be perfect is the possibility of emotional and physical burnout, which can make people more susceptible to health problems. The situation can turn out to be worse when someone is a perfectionist, which most likely has no desire to find help. In their perspective, they will be seen as someone with a personal weakness and imperfection (Flett & Hewitt, 2020b).

Based on the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2020), monitoring reports throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic, nine out of ten students (87%) in 165 countries were affected by the closures of universities caused by the coronavirus. Moreover,

78% of homes with American high school or college students were said to experience educational blockage or disruption caused by COVID-19, and from the ones that were said to have the disruptions, 80% of them were admitted to experiencing and suffering from high levels of increasing stress. The Befrienders Kuala Lumpur patron, Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye, mentioned that the pandemic and the Movement Control Order (MCO) have contributed to emotional distress towards various perspectives, as the norm had changed, and people feared for their safety (Bernama, 2020). At worst, some of them also struggle with having thoughts of suicide. Here, there is an urgency to discover stress topics, especially in the context of the Pandemic. Most of the reasons that can increase the statistics on stress among Malaysia's university students can vary depending on the individual and their environment. When students with high levels of perfectionism become neurotic and experience stress because they are unable to adjust to the circumstances, disorganized schedules that are intertwined between studies and extracurricular activities can contribute to daily life pressure (Yusof et al., 2019).

Perfectionists are individuals who have the desire and a need for them to justify themselves better to other people. Perfectionism can be classified into adaptive perfectionism/healthy perfectionism and maladaptive perfectionism/unhealthy perfectionism. Adaptive perfectionism is related to high motivation, high achievement, and a positive way of coping with a situation (Rice & Lopez, 2004). Meanwhile, maladaptive perfectionism is related to excessive worry about their performance with the occurrence of anxiety, depression, and other psychiatric issues or problems. Higher workload due to online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic might lead university students with higher perfectionism to pressure themselves to be perfect in their daily and academic lives, consequently affecting their stress levels. In advance, based on the previous study by Beck and Verticchio (2020) revealed that maladaptive perfectionism of students is more vulnerable to the negative consequences of stress than the one with adaptive perfectionism. Hence, it is crucial to understand the association between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism toward stress among university students.

4.2 THEORY OF PERFECTIONISM AND STRESS

According to Hewitt and Flett's (1991) model of multidimensional perfectionism, adaptive perfectionism explains that people with self-oriented perfectionism because their self-standards are not too high, allowing them to strive for improvement. Other-oriented perfectionists were labeled adaptive perfectionists because they set incredibly high criteria for others rather than attempting to meet the high standards themselves. In advance, self-oriented perfectionism is most likely related to high scores in the standards subscale. Adaptive perfectionism is most likely associated with high standards and low discrepancy. Although adaptive perfectionists know that no one can ever be flawless in all they do, they nevertheless constantly endeavor to meet the high standards they have set. Many top achievers adopt this constructive mental attitude since it is healthy. Maladaptive perfectionists, on the other hand, are most typically associated with high standards and significant disparities. It has established an unattainable standard and expects to meet it whenever it works on anything.

The transactional theory of stress and coping, developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), provides a useful framework for understanding how individuals experience and respond to stress. According to this theory, stress arises from interactions between an individual's cognitive, emotional, physiological, and psychological systems and their surrounding environment (Walinga, 2014). The way and action that an individual assesses or evaluates their stressor will determine how they can manage or choose the way to respond to the stressor. Because each component must be understood as a part of a complicated process, this model underlined that stress cannot be characterized as a single component. The effects of external stressors are linked to how people interpret such stressors. As a result, not everyone will be stressed at the same level in the same stressful conditions.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) identified two key types of appraisal: Primary and secondary. The person's assessment of how well they can manage a stressor given their coping resources influences the stressful