

## PROCRASTINATION RATES AND SIMILARITIES AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS OF MALAYSIA AND PAKISTAN

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Procrastination is a widely noted global human problem affecting people from all spheres of life especially the academic one. Many studies have been done in Western and Individualistic countries but there is an evident lack of research in Asian and collectivistic countries such as Malaysia(MY) and Pakistan(PK). This study explored the prevalence of procrastination in university students of Malaysia and Pakistan as similarities between the two countries made the researchers believe that a very comparable distribution and rate of procrastination would be found from the two countries. The participants of this study were 200 students from two (one Malaysian, one Pakistani) universities. Tuckman's procrastination scale was used and it was found that participants from both countries had very similar percentage of students falling into different severity levels of procrastination. Moreover, it was found that there were no significant mean differences in terms of severity and prevalence in the two samples. The percentage of mild procrastination was found to be 19% in Pakistan (PK) to 21% in Malaysia (MY), moderate procrastination was found to be 70%(PK) to 67%(MY), whereas 11%(PK) to 12%(MY) of participants were found to be having severe procrastination. Further exploration of this phenomenon of procrastination in Asian and collectivistic milieu has been suggested. Moreover, procrastination could be studied more in the two countries concurrently owing to the similarities found in the current study. In addition, severe procrastination should be given more attention in the two countries as both have a sizeable number of students falling in this category.

### INTRODUCTION

Procrastination can be defined as the intentional delay of an important task in the favor of an unimportant and trivial task in order to avoid doing the important task. Delaying the important task usually causes hindrance in its completion and makes the person become less productive than they can otherwise be. (Wolters and Corkin, 2012).Procrastination can be found in many aspects of one's life and it is quite pervasive phenomenon in terms of its affect on different strata of people. Nonetheless, during the course of this study the focus would be on procrastination that is present in a student of higher education during their studies.

Such procrastination among student population is sometimes denoted as academic procrastination (Steel, 2007) but here in this article, the word procrastination would be used synonymously with academic procrastination. This is so because many researchers have not made any distinction in referring to general procrastination and academic procrastination while studying it among students

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(Tuckman, 1991; Steel, 2011). Procrastination has been widely studied in university students and it has been found that it can lead to a lot of undesirable consequences. Emotional disturbance and poor academic performance are its most common outcomes. Increased unease, burden and illness are linked to procrastination (Steel, 2007, 2011).

Studies suggest that procrastinators not only tend to perform poorly than non-procrastinators but also experience poorer health, higher levels of stress and fatigue, mild depression, anxiety, and lower self esteem; all affective attributes that may impact the learning experience (Wolters and Corkin, 2012). Following are some of the results of procrastination of university students; incomplete assigned tasks, cramming instead of understanding the subject matter, social and/or test anxiety, employment of self crippling strategies, poor achievement, dread of failure, distressed mental health (Dewitte and Schouwenburg, 2002).

Data from multiple countries suggest that between 50% and 95% of college students procrastinate on a regular basis (Steel and Ferrari, 2013). Ellis and Knaus have also reported a similar estimate in 1977. Steel (2007) suggested that nearly everyone procrastinates to some degree. The rate of severe procrastination among tertiary level students has been reported to be 32 to 24 % in the western countries (Burka and Yuen, 2008; Costa *et al.*, 2009; Day, Mensink, and O'Sullivan, 2000; Steel and Ferrari, 2013; Steel, 2011).

However there still is a need to assess the rate of procrastination among university students of Malaysia and Pakistan because of two reasons. First is that there is a dearth of studies regarding in issue in the Asian collectivistic milieu (Klassen and Kuzucu, 2009) and the second reason is that the percentage of heavy or extreme procrastinators, needing immediate help, is not readily available as Hussain and Sultan (2010) have argued that such studies are virtually nonexistent in Pakistani context. Side by side Komarraju, Karau, and Ramayah (2007) have found a similar state of affairs in Malaysia. Both Malaysia and Pakistan share a lot of characteristics. Both countries share a history of being a British colony. Both model their higher education system on British higher education system. Both countries are multiethnic collectivistic Asian countries. Both use English as the medium of instruction in most of the higher education institutions (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2009). Although there are many differences between the two countries but still we deemed them similar enough to compare and contrast the obtained data owing to the aforesaid evidences. The likelihood of procrastination mostly corresponds with age, gender, geographical location, education and marital status. Most commonly the procrastinators are unmarried and young men who do not possess high education and live in such countries that have a poor overall self-discipline. It is to be noticed that procrastination has a linkage between education and sex, hence this further endorses that men academically lag behind women (in higher education) due to less skills for self-regulation (Steel, 2007, 2011).

However, most of the aforesaid procrastination studies have been executed in the western/northern and individualistic countries (Ozan Gundogdu, Bay, and Celkan, 2012; Steel and Ferrari, 2013) and data from more eastern/southern and collectivistic countries is very limited. Moreover, data from Malaysia and Pakistan is especially scarce with respect to the knowledge about the profile of a procrastinator (Hussain and Sultan, 2010; Komarraju *et al.*, 2007). This gap in the international research literature should be addressed by researchers from such countries and the present study is aiming to do so. The primary aims of the current study include investigating the level of procrastination among university students of Malaysia and Pakistan (Asian collectivistic countries). Here, the different percentages and severity levels of procrastination will be shown. Then the issue of different settings and a rough estimate of the prevalence of procrastination will be explored. Although such a study with limited data cannot predict the prevalence rate of any problem in a society or culture. But still, some rough estimates can be drawn. And although stress is not being considered directly as a variable of interest in the current study but maybe severity of procrastination may indirectly show some hint in this regard as stress has been shown to coincide with procrastination (Wyk, 2005). Moreover, it has been assumed that there would be more similarities than differences found between the sets of data from Malaysia and Pakistan because both countries have more cultural and environmental factors similar and the differences between the two countries are not much pronounced on many a dimensions (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2009; Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Hence, this study aims to demonstrate whether our hypothesized Asian (collectivistic) perspective is similar as assumed or does this categorization not get supported by the data.

### **OBJECTIVES**

The current study had 2 main objectives. 1. To find out the prevalence of different levels of procrastination in university students of Malaysia and Pakistan. 2. To find out the similarities in terms of procrastination, between samples from Malaysia and Pakistan. (This objective entails a hypothesis: “There is no difference between the prevalence and distribution of procrastination in the two countries”).

### **METHODOLOGY**

Tuckman’s procrastination scale was used in this study to measure procrastination among university students (Tuckman, 1991). It is a 16 item scale and responses on it are given on a 4 point Likert type scale ranging from 1 to 4. Maximum scores can be 64 and minimum 16. Higher scores mean higher procrastination level. A score below 20 means absence of procrastination and the person is among ‘non procrastinators’. Scores in the range of 21 to 32 mean that there is mild procrastination and the person is among ‘mild procrastinators’. Scores in the range

of 33 to 47 mean that there is ample procrastination present and the person is among 'procrastinators'. Scores that are 48 or higher mean that there is a severe level of procrastination and the person is among 'severe procrastinators'. This level of procrastination may be damaging to the study life of the person (Tuckman et al., 2008). The scale was used in its original form in English language as the participants were university students with English as their medium of instruction. The alpha reliability coefficient of 0.79 was obtained in the present study. The current study had 200 participants (81 males, 119 females) who were students of two public sector universities of Malaysia and Pakistan. The Malaysian university is located in the state of Johor and Pakistani university is from Punjab province and Faisalabad district. Out of these total participants, 100 (43 males, 57 females) were from Malaysia and 100 (38 Males, 62 females) were from Pakistan. The mean age of the participants was about 23 years. Those university students who volunteered to fill in the research instrument were taken as participants of this study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The first research objective of this research was to find out the prevalence rate of procrastination with respect to different intensities of it. The reason it is of prime importance is the unavailability of data from Asian milieu regarding procrastination among university students. Piers Steel (2007) has also suggested that most of the studies regarding procrastination are from the United States and a more wide variety of settings need to be studied in order to truly understand the global trends of procrastination. Such an unavailability of universal data makes it difficult for the policy makers or mental health professionals to be properly informed about this rather troublesome phenomenon of procrastination among the vulnerable university students and to take necessary preventive or interceptive measures. So in the present study, the prevalence of procrastination was tapped in from two settings across Asia, i.e. Malaysia and Pakistan. Another point to bear in mind here was the severity of procrastination levels in terms of their dispersion across university students. So the prevalence of procrastination has not just been presented as just an overall percentage but breakdown of severity of procrastination has also been clearly elucidated (see table 1). This would make it easier for the policy makers and mental health professionals to expect certain levels of severity among the university students when planning support services and intervention plans.

The results of this study show that the students of both Malaysia and Pakistan are affected by procrastination in almost equal proportions. Moreover, this proportion is almost comparably similar in both countries and across gender. One more thing to note here is that no one was found absolutely free from procrastination in both countries. The gender differences between participants were quite negligible i.e. not more than 5% at any severity level and at both within and between the two

countries except at moderate procrastination severity where the gender disparity has been found to be about 10% within Malaysian participants (see table 3). This mention of gender was not an objective of this study; however, the data has shown as an additional piece of relevant information. One of the most significant points to note here is that there were about 11 to 12 percent of students found suffering from severe form of procrastination. Students suffering from severe procrastination should seek professional help as per Tuckman *et al.* (2008). Vast majorities (67-70%) of students from both countries moderately procrastinate and few (19-21%) are mild procrastinators.

The present study has assumed that there are more reasons to believe that Malaysian and Pakistani university students are similar than different (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede *et al.*, 2010), and so this study assumed that there would be no significant difference between Malaysian and Pakistani sample on the basis of their procrastination. This assumption founds the basis of the second objective this study which is to find out the similarities between the two countries. This idea of similarity between the countries has been supported by the finding that the data analysis which concluded that there is no significant difference between participants from Malaysia and Pakistan in terms of their level of procrastination (see table table 2). Moreover, the distribution of severity is also the same in the sample. This strengthens the assumption of present study regarding Asian collectivistic milieu of the similarities Pakistan and Malaysia and our hypothesis of similarity is supported by the data.

TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE (OR NUMBER-N) OF PAKISTANI AND MALAYSIAN STUDENTS AND LEVELS OF THEIR PROCRASTINATION SEVERITY

	<i>Pakistani</i>	<i>Malaysian</i>
Non Procrastinators	0%	0%
Mild Procrastinators	19%	21%
Procrastinators	70%	67%
Severe Procrastinators	11%	12%

TABLE 2: PERCENTAGE OF PAKISTANI AND MALAYSIAN STUDENTS AND LEVELS OF THEIR PROCRASTINATION SEVERITY

	<i>Pakistani</i>		<i>Malaysian</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Non Procrastinators	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mild Procrastinators	29.2	2.8	29.4	2.5	-.25	38	No
Procrastinators	39.8	4.2	39.2	4.1	.76	135	No
Severe Procrastinators	49.9	2.3	51.5	3.9	-1.2	21	No

*Note:* M=Mean. SD=Standard deviation. *df*=Degree of freedom. *Sig.* = Significance (Is there any significance difference?)

It can be noted from table 2, that there is no significant difference between the Pakistani sample and Malaysian sample on the basis of their procrastination in all the sub categories. Mild procrastinators, moderate procrastinators and severe procrastinators have been found to be quite similar in number in the sample studied. The independent samples *t*-test yielded no significantly different results and hence our hypothesis of no difference between the prevalence and distribution of procrastination in the two countries has been supported by the results.

TABLE 3: GENDER WISE PERCENTAGE OF PAKISTANI AND MALAYSIAN STUDENTS AND LEVELS OF THEIR PROCRASTINATION SEVERITY

	<i>Pakistani</i>		<i>Malaysian</i>	
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
Non Procrastinators	0%	0%	0%	0%
Mild Procrastinators	15.8%	21.0%	16.3	22.8%
Procrastinators	71.1%	69.4%	74.4	61.4%
Severe Procrastinators	13.2%	9.7%	9.3	14.0%

Overall, the findings of the present study are that most university students in Malaysia and Pakistan procrastinate, however some present with severe procrastination. Procrastination trends are very similar across the two countries and both potentially need to attend to the needs of those students suffering from severe procrastination. Moreover, big gender disparity with respect to procrastination was not found as well.

The current study is in line with other Malaysian and Pakistani studies hinting at levels of procrastination in Malaysia and Pakistan. One such study claimed that procrastination is a problem faced by many of the Malaysian university students but no clear cut details about the rate of the procrastination was found (Zeenath & Orcullo, 2012). However Yaakub (2000) has suggested some rates of procrastination among the university students of Malaysia and he reports that 53.7 percent of the university students belonged to the low procrastination category, and 40.33 percent fell in the moderate category. Additionally, 6 percent were found to be suffering from high or severe procrastination (Yaakub, 2000). However, prevalence rates could not be found and only hints of mere recognition of problem of procrastination in Pakistan could be found (Hussain & Sultan, 2010; Saleem & Rafique, 2012).

The results found in the present study are also quite similar to those reported in across the globe (Steel and Ferarri, 2013). Most of the student procrastinate and this study has found that 100% of the students procrastinate to some degree and this statistic is comparable to the one put forth by Steel (2007) in his meta analysis where he reports this statistic to be close to 95%. Mild and sever procrastinators both have been found to be a minority as compared to the moderate procrastinators.

Moreover, the number of students who are affected by serious procrastination is a bit lower than what has been suggested by other studies as Steel has noted the number of serious procrastination to be about 20%. In our study we found that about 11% of Pakistani students and 12% of Malaysian students suffer from severe procrastination. Albeit lower than other countries, but 10% is still a big number when we consider them from the perspective of extending institutional support to them. It was noted that there was no specialized support program for such students suffering from severe procrastination in either of the universities from where the data was collected (i.e. Malaysian and Pakistani). **Conclusion**In the present study, procrastination was studied in a bit understudied milieu of collectivistic non-Western countries i.e. university students of Malaysia and Pakistan. Most of the students were found to be procrastinators; however, some were having severe procrastination. Then another thing that needs to be underscored is that the number and dispersion of university students, across the two countries, affected by different severities of procrastination were found to be in close proximity. This can mean that the two Asian countries Malaysia and Pakistan are more similar in their culture and student habits supporting the similarity notion that was hypothesized in the present research. In addition, this study begs for more studies to be conducted regarding procrastination and its support arrangements in collectivistic Asian countries especially Malaysia and Pakistan.

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