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**PERSONAL PREDICTORS OF PROCRASTINATION AND  
PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGICAL SECURITY**

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*Abstract*

The phenomenon of procrastination is on the rise. In contemporary psychological literature procrastination is considered to be a penchant of an individual to “putting off” finishing important projects, which results in negative outcomes in both professional and personal life. As researchers argue the tendency of “delaying tasks for later” influences all spheres of human activities, and, most disconcertingly, procrastination has become widespread among young people. In Russia, the amount of research work into procrastination has not been as considerable as in the West, but the number of scholars focusing on this phenomenon has been growing. One of these aspects to be elucidated is personal predictors of procrastination and specifics of their relationships with personality psychological security.

The article presents the results of the study into a relationship between procrastination and personal traits relating to cognitive, emotional and behavioral spheres. Procrastination predictors in the period of adolescence are also examined. The correlation analysis revealed significant bonds between procrastination and such personal characteristics as impulsiveness, socially-prescribed perfectionism, anxiety, general internality, internality in the sphere of achievement and failure. The regression analysis showed that significant predictors are impulsiveness, internality with regard to failure and anxiety. The link between personal predictors of procrastination and psychological security of teenagers is disclosed. Further prospects for the research efforts on the given problem are offered.

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**Keywords:** Procrastination, personality psychological security, perfectionism, locus control, anxiety, achievement motivations.



## 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of procrastination has been known since ancient times. As far back as around 800 BC a Greek poet Hesiod wrote about man's addiction to postponing things for later. Mark Cicero remarked that slowness in decision making is common among the ultimate authority, which gives rise to ill-effects. In modern world this phenomenon has not lost its topicality, moreover, as some scholars state, it has become "the bane" of modernity (Nguyen et al., 2013; Vindeker et al., 2016). So, 80-90% of American college students reported problems with "postponing things for tomorrow" (O'Brien, 2002). In Russia about the same 90% of students are procrastinators (Kovylin, 2013). More than 20% of adults engaged in different types of professional activity prefer "delaying things for later" (Steel, 2007). In the world of economy procrastination can cause serious financial losses, in politics – ineffective political decisions, in medicine – health damage.

### 1.1. The Phenomenon of Procrastination

Nowadays there is no universally accepted definition of the concept "procrastination". This term was first introduced by Ringenbach in 1977. Initially, procrastination was considered to be similar to the concept of "idleness", some thought it to be a psychic state characterized by unwillingness to do anything requiring conation (Kovylin, 2013).

In 1986, Lay updated the concept "procrastination" defining it as voluntary irrational putting off of planned tasks despite probable adverse consequences (Lay, 1986). Ferrari treated procrastination as striving for adrenaline rush which emerges under time pressure (Ferrari, 1992). Steel interpreted procrastination as a strategy of avoiding doing non-pleasurable tasks (Steel, 2007). In contemporary scientific literature one can find other definitions of procrastination: maladaptive strategy of coping with stress (Garanyan, 2010), complex, heterogeneous in psychological terms phenomenon integrating behavioral, emotional and cognitive components closely connected with personality motivation (Kovylin, 2013). At present, procrastination is basically defined as being frequently prone to delaying doing things that matter until a later time with negative outcomes in professional and personal life (Lay, 1997; Steel, 2007; Kovylin, 2013; Vindeker et al., 2016; etc.).

Procrastination causes lowered self-efficacy, self-confidence and ability to take decisions without guidance, which, in its turn, results in disappointment and dissatisfaction with life, feelings of the person's vulnerability (psychological insecurity) in socium. In their work Dontsov et al. give the following definition of personality psychological security: "Security is a condition of a person according to which he/she can satisfy basic needs for self-preservation and [can have a] perception of being secure (psychologically) in society" (Dontsov et al., 2013, p. 99). Consequently, procrastination acts as a factor provoking decline of personality psychological security.

### 1.2. The Reasons for Procrastination

What causes procrastination has remained one of the most "acute" and debatable aspects of research into "putting things off for later". There exist a bunch of theories explaining the reasons for procrastination, but none of them is universally recognized and accepted.

One prevalent present-day approach to exploring procrastination reasons is based on individual personality traits of procrastinators. Researchers examine interrelations between procrastination and such characteristics as fears, loss of control over situation, failure, success, grades, etc. (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984; Clark & Hill, 1994), anxiety (Varvicheva, 2010; Karlovskaya & Baranova, 2008; Bilal, 2009), perfectionism (Flett et al, 1992; Mokhova & Nevryueev, 2013), locus of control (Milgram & Tenne, 2000; Brownlou & Reasinger, 2000), emotional intellect (Chow, 2011; Smorkalova & Vasil'eva, 2016), neuroticism (Beswick et al., 1988), achievement motivation (Vindeker & Ostanina, 2014) and others.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The study into factors of procrastination is especially important with regard to adolescents since it is the period when aspirations for self-actualization, life-goals setting are prevalent. Along with that, habitual procrastination contributes to non-craving – inability to develop long-term life plans, low self-confidence, and inability to make decisions without directions and realize them. It also distorts the process of socialization during adolescence period.

The majority of procrastinators would like to get rid of the “prone to putting things off for later” as procrastination generates tension, stress situations and, as a result, poses threats to psychological wellbeing and personality psychological security. In light of this, Dontsov and Perelygina underline: “Increased tension is perceived by the person as the possibility of emerging anomie and destruction, as the likelihood of deformation of the person’s objectives and role-play positions, as the separation of the individual level of attainability and the specific systems of relevance» (Dontsov & Perelygina, 2013, p. 22).

Although there has been a considerable amount of research work the question remains how procrastination relates to different personal traits, in particular, locus of control (Varvaricheva, 2010; Smorkalova et al, 2017), achievement motivation (Vindeker & Ostanina, 2014), perfectionism (Flett et al., 1992), anxiety (Tice & Baumeister, 1997; Lay & Silverman, 1996), impulsiveness (Varvaricheva, 2010), etc. It is worth mentioning that the authors focused on links of procrastination with certain characteristics rather than on predictors of the phenomenon of “postponing things for later”.

## **3. Research Questions**

The three key components of personality are cognitive, emotional-volitional and behavioral spheres. That is why we put an emphasis on the question: What contribution to the development of procrastination does each personality substructure make?

Impulsiveness acted as a variable reflecting behavior, locus of control and perfectionism represented cognition variables and personality anxiety and achievement motivation expressed emotion and volition variables. Hence the question: What personality traits relating to cognition, behavior and emotion-volition spheres are more closely connected with “putting things off for later”?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to identify relationships between procrastination and personality characteristics relating to cognitive, emotional-volitional and behavioral spheres, to find predictors of

procrastination during the period of adolescence, and to address procrastination as a threat to personality psychological security.

## 5. Research Methods

The empirical base of the study included 75 students, 33 males and 42 females aged 14-18. Average age was 15.

Procrastination was assessed with General Procrastination Scale by C.H. Lay adapted by O.S. Vindeker, M.V. Ostanina (describes procrastination as a dispositional, resilient personality trait).

For assessing perfectionism Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) developed by (P.L. Hewitt and G.L. Flett adapted by I.I. Grachyova was used. This scale describes perfectionism through the lens of its social aspects and singles out three main components of perfectionism: self-oriented, other-oriented and socially-prescribed.

Personality anxiety was assessed with State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) pioneered by C. Spielberger, adapted by U.L. Khanin.

The questionnaire "Achievement Motivation" developed by A. Mekhrabyan was used for assessing achievement motivation.

Impulsive behavior was assessed with the help of V.V. Boyko' Express diagnostics "Unmanageable Extreme Irritability".

In order to assess locus control the J.B. Rotter Locus of Control Scale was used. The following scales were indicated: control in situations of achievement, failure, in personal life and at work, control with regard to health and general level of internality. In this study scales reflecting locus control in terms of achievement, failure and general level of internality were used.

The data were processed with the use of IBM SPSS Statistics 17. In order to check variables normality distribution Kolmogorov-Smirnov criterion was used, whose value appeared to be insignificant, when  $p < 0.05$ , which testifies to the normal distribution of variables used in the study. To reveal presence/absence of correlation between variables the Pearson's correlation coefficient was applied. In order to identify predictors of procrastination among teenagers we used multiple regression analysis.

## 6. Findings

The results of the correlation analysis revealed that the respondents' procrastination is selectively connected with their personality traits. Tables 01-02 show the results of the correlation analysis, statistically significant relations between variables are given in bold type ( $p \leq 0.05$ ).

**Table 01.** Relationships between Procrastination and Personal Traits Relating to Cognitive Sphere, among Males and Females Students

Variables	Correlation coefficient	P-level
Self-oriented perfectionism	0.122	0.347
<b>Socially-prescribed perfectionism</b>	<b>0.223</b>	<b>0.033</b>
Other-oriented perfectionism	0.80	0.532
General level of perfectionism	0.105	0.418

<b>General internality</b>	<b>-0.235</b>	<b>0.035</b>
<b>Internality with regard to achievement</b>	<b>-0.160</b>	<b>0.04</b>
<b>Internality with regard to failure</b>	<b>0.280</b>	<b>0.021</b>

**Table 02.** Relationships between Procrastination and Personal Traits Relating to Emotional-and-Volitional and Behavioral Spheres, among Males and Females

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Correlation coefficient</b>	<b>P-level</b>
Achievement motivation	-0.153	0.254
<b>Personality anxiety</b>	<b>0.30</b>	<b>0.038</b>
<b>Impulsiveness</b>	<b>0.35</b>	<b>0.016</b>

According to Table 01 procrastination has positive correlation with socially-prescribed perfectionism. Similar results about relations between procrastination and socially-prescribed perfectionism were reported in the Saddler and Sacks' study (Saddler & Sacks, 1993). These results can be explained in the following way: since this type of perfectionism is determined by the individual' concern that people around tend to evaluate him hypercritically, make him be perfect, then fear of negative evaluation provokes his "putting things off for later" in order to move away the situation carrying threats of being denounced by others. For procrastinators consequences of this "delaying tasks until a later time" are connected with dissatisfaction with themselves, collapse of social ties, inability to perform well, and, as a result, decline of personality psychological security.

Absence of significant correlation between procrastination and other indicators of perfectionism is likely to occur due to the fact their relations between procrastination and other indicators of perfectionism are ambivalent owing to complexity of these very constructs. Thus, Karlovskaya and Shistakova indicate that links between procrastination and perfectionism depend on the type of perfectionism the person exhibits (Karlovskaya & Shistakova, 2009). Of all types it is "neurotic" perfectionism which is often closely associated with procrastination. Probably, our respondents were "neurotic" perfectionists according to the scale "socially-prescribed perfectionism" type and closer to "normal" according to the rest of perfectionism scales.

As for the relations between locus of control' indicators and procrastination we see that there exists positive and negative correlation between the parameters. Positive correlation was revealed between "putting things for later" and internality regarding failure. High scores on internality with regard to failure demonstrate the respondents' developed subjective control when it comes to negative situations, which manifests itself in the fact that they blame themselves for various troubles and misfortune. Therefore, the more male and female students tend to self-accusation, the more frequently they will procrastinate. Consequently, one may assume that teenagers reporting high scores on the given scale use procrastination as a coping strategy for their self-esteem, hence, they have a sensation of being psychologically vulnerable. As Zotova and Pereylygina argue, "the state of security makes people more open, to a lesser extent they rely on defense mechanisms so that to support a sense of self-worth" (Zotova & Pereylygina, 2016, p. 8).

The results of the study showed that procrastination is inversely proportional to the scale measuring general internality. High score on general internality indicates a high level of subjective control over any life situations. Thus, the lower the subjective control of procrastinators is, the higher the level of

procrastination. Consequently, procrastinators do not believe in their own strengths, man's ability to control his life, make independent decisions and implement them. These results obtained are consistent with the Milgram and Tenne data on relations between locus control and procrastination (Milgram & Tenne, 2000).

Negative correlation was revealed between internality regarding achievement scale and procrastination, which implies that the higher self-control with regard of achievement is, the less frequent proneness to procrastination manifests itself. Locus of control in terms of motivation is associated with self-respect, responsibility for personal achievements, self-confidence. That is why procrastinators, probably, tend not to tie up their actions and achievement, make them incapable of controlling themselves and believe that the majority of events in their life are a result of luck or other people influence. Accordingly, one might assume that procrastinators can be dissatisfied with life due to its ill-organization, poor predictability of outcomes, diversity of mishaps and fiascos. The situation is aggravated by the fact that "every person has a plenty of choices, which can induce serious risks to his life in case he makes a wrong choice. Doubts cause painful tension, anxiety and fear" (Perelygina, 2016, p. 27). Permanent negative situations of this nature result in undermining adolescents' physical and psychological health.

The results of the correlation analysis revealed that procrastination was positively related to the variable "impulsiveness" (see Table 02). The stronger male and female students' impulsiveness, the more likely they are to postpone things for later. Impulsive people are thought to be reckless, beset with desires of the moment, prone to unduly risky behavior, careless about their future (Khromov, 2000). That is why it is logical enough that people who can be easily distracted by pleasant but up-to-the-minute things are more likely to procrastinate trying to avoid doing less pleasant things with long-term outcome. Higher impulsiveness is often coupled with emotional instability, blind spot on possible dangers, poorly conceived actions, which, in turn, can cause a threat to personality psychological security.

The data obtained indicate a positive correlation between procrastination and personality anxiety. Consequently, the higher level of anxiety adolescents have, the more likely they are engaged in procrastination. In their study Carden et al. also revealed positive correlation between procrastination and anxiety (Carden et al., 2004). In this connection, Burka and Yuen forwarded a hypothesis that procrastination can be stress and failure coping strategy (Burka & Yuen, 1983). People with a high level of anxiety are more likely to be prone to self-accusation in case of failure, doubts and hesitancy, try to avoid criticism, and because of it they will procrastinate especially when it comes to some really important tasks. One more explanation of this correlation may be the fact that during adolescence it is vital for teenagers to belong to peer group, and here, conversely, fear of success can be a cause of procrastination as achievement gained can stir up jealousy, antagonism on the part of their group members, and, as a consequence, rejection and a sense of vulnerability.

The study did not reveal statistically significant correlation between achievement motivation and procrastination. The data obtained make it possible to draw a conclusion that regardless of achievement motivation level the subjects reported that procrastination was common for them. This result was obtained in the study of Vindeker and Ostanina (Vindeker & Ostanina, (2014). Considering procrastination as stress and anxiety coping strategy it is quite explicable that once there exists high achievement motivation proneness to procrastination will also appear. Conceivably, procrastination in this case is also a specific period of becoming familiar with a new type of activity.

The regression analysis we performed showed the significant predictors of procrastination within the respondents' group (model:  $p=0.011$ , adjusted  $R^2=0.462$ ) were impulsiveness (where  $p=0.017$ ,  $\beta=0.436$ ), internality with regard to failure (where  $p=0.021$ ,  $\beta=-0.340$ ) and personality anxiety (where  $p=0.003$ ,  $\beta=0.325$ ). A step-by-step method used in the regression analysis provided evidence regarding the impact of not one independent variable (personality traits) on dependent one (procrastination) but several variables simultaneously and allowed for assessing their contribution to regressand' variance. Thus, it is evident that the greater contribution to procrastination variance is made by such personality trait as impulsiveness (19%), internality with regard to failure takes second place (11%) and personality anxiety comes third (10%). It is clear that all variables measuring personality substructures (behavior – impulsiveness, cognition – internality regarding failure, emotion and volition – personality anxiety) contribute to procrastination variance. Consequently, one can assume that in order to alter procrastination during adolescence it is necessary to use intervention which incorporates all personality components (cognitive, behavioral, emotional-and-volitional) rather than address each component separately. In addition, prevention of procrastination requires reducing levels of anxiety and impulsiveness as well as developing adolescents' internal focus of control.

## 7. Conclusion

The results of the study allow us to draw the following conclusions. Personality traits associated with behavioural, cognitive and affective spheres play an essential role in the formation and development of procrastination during adolescence. Hence, the necessity arises to use simultaneous interventions in all personality substructures.

The more likely male and female students are prone to procrastination, the higher their level of impulsiveness, socially-prescribed perfectionism, personality anxiety and the lower level of self-control, self-confidence and self-efficacy they exhibit. That is why successful intervention for procrastination should involve reducing anxiety and perfectionism and, conversely, fostering a desire to make conscious decisions, well-conceived plans and enhancing awareness of their own strengths and capabilities.

One interesting result brought up by the study is the lack of a relationship between achievement motivation and proneness to “putting things off for later”. One may conclude that an increase in achievement motivation' level does not heavily effect manifestations of adolescents' procrastination and, possibly, procrastination in this case is also a specific period of becoming familiar with a new type of activity.

As the study shows personality traits associated with procrastination – impulsiveness, personality anxiety, socially prescribed perfectionism, low internal locus of control can become factors threatening personality security during adolescence.

The study into a gender aspect of procrastination's link with personality traits among adolescents as well as specifics of procrastination' impact on psychological wellbeing and personality psychological security can become a promising research perspective. A high level of procrastination on both decisions and life plans poses the task for psychologists of reducing procrastination as a factor hindering the youth' success and searching procrastination predictors since such destructive behavior can be a serious threat to psychological wellbeing of the rising generation.

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