



The Dynamics of Perfectionism and Psychological Distress: The Mediating Role of Self-Esteem

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Abstract. Senior students often face stress while writing their theses, which can potentially lead to psychological distress. One dispositional factor believed to play a role is perfectionism, with self-esteem serving as the psychological mechanism that explains this relationship. This study aims to examine the role of self-esteem as a mediator in the relationship between perfectionism and distress. The study employed a quantitative approach with 361 participants. Measurements were taken using the DASS-21, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), and the MPCIE, and the data were analyzed using mediation analysis. The results showed that perfectionism was positively associated with distress ($r = 0.435$; $p < .001$) and negatively associated with self-esteem ($r = -0.238$; $p < .001$), while self-esteem was negatively associated with distress ($r = -0.539$; $p < .001$). Self-esteem was found to partially mediate the relationship between perfectionism and distress ($B = 0.193$; $p < .001$). These findings underscore the importance of self-esteem in explaining the contribution of perfectionism to psychological distress.

Keywords: *psychological distress; perfectionism; self-esteem; senior college students*

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Introduction

Entering the final year of college, students are required to complete a final project, a thesis, as a graduation requirement. However, these academic demands are often viewed as a burden that exceeds individual capacity, triggering stress. Final-year students are vulnerable to stress due to the pressure of completing the thesis, revising it, and demanding academic time (Anjarwati & Noorrizkki, 2024). The prevalence of stress among students in Indonesia is reported to range from 36.7% to 71.6% (Antara et al., 2025). Other research findings indicate that students writing theses are vulnerable to stress due to academic demands and the complex process of completing the final project (Marfuatunnisa & Sandjaja, 2023). This phenomenon is reinforced by the findings of Hendarto & Ambarwati (2020) who found that 57.4% of students experienced moderate stress, and Agusmar et al. (2019) who reported that 49.5% of final-year students fell into the same category. More broadly, these findings confirm that stress among students writing their theses is a serious issue that requires attention.

Students writing their theses are prone to various psychological problems, such as anxiety, frustration, feelings of inadequacy, and concerns about the results they will achieve (Giyarto, 2018; Sugito, 2022). These conditions arise because the thesis writing process requires students to face various academic pressures, ranging from difficulty determining research topics, repeated repetitions, time constraints, difficulty obtaining references, to the demand to complete studies quickly (Maritapiska, 2003; Zakaria, 2017). If this pressure persists and cannot be managed effectively, the stress experienced can develop into psychological distress, a condition characterized by symptoms of anxiety, depression, and excessive stress that disrupt an individual's functioning in daily life (Hendarto & Ambarwati, 2020). This condition can have an impact on declining psychological well-being, lowering academic performance, and increasing the risk of various more serious mental health problems (Verger et al., 2009; Glozah & Pevalin, 2014).

In addition to being supported by previous research findings, this phenomenon is also evident in data obtained by researchers through the distribution of online questionnaires to 361 students in Indonesia who are writing their theses. The analysis results showed that the level of psychological distress experienced by participants was in the moderate to high category, indicating that the thesis writing process has the potential to cause significant psychological stress. These findings reinforce the urgency of research into the factors that contribute to the emergence of psychological distress in final-year students.

Lazarus (1986) divides stress into two types: eustress and distress. Eustress is a positive response to a stressor that has a positive impact (Kloidt & Barsalou, 2024). Distress is severe

stress that has a negative impact, both emotionally and physically (Lazarus and Folkman, [1984](#)). According to Mirowsky and Ross ([1986](#)) distress is defined as a general term that includes stress, malaise, depression, anxiety, and various other related mental health problems. Distress refers to negative or unpleasant feelings that arise from certain life events. The stress experienced by final-year students who are writing their thesis is included in negative stress that triggers the emergence of various negative feelings, such as anxiety, dizziness, fear, and worry (Giyarto, [2018](#); Kupriyanov & Zhdanov, [2014](#)). Several researchers have concluded that distress levels tend to be higher among students when compared to non-student groups of similar gender and age (Verger et al., [2009](#)). Distress conditions trigger the emergence of anxiety, depression (Jayanthi et al., [2015](#)), and even at a fatal level can trigger the risk of suicide (Sugiarti et al., [2018](#)).

One dispositional factor that plays a role in the emergence of psychological distress in individuals is perfectionism. Perfectionism has been identified as an important personality factor that can explain individual differences in experiencing psychological distress (O'Connor et al., [2007](#)). Perfectionism is characterized by a strong drive to avoid mistakes and a tendency to set very high performance standards, accompanied by overly critical self-evaluation (Flett & Hewitt, [2002](#)). The results of a survey conducted by Sunarty ([2016](#)) showed that perfectionism is one of the internal obstacles in the preparation of the thesis with a percentage of 52%. Meta-analysis by (Curran & Hill, [2019](#)) shows that the level of perfectionism among young people has experienced a gradual increase over the past 27 years influenced by social pressure through social media and academics, as well as demands to meet high standards both from oneself and others. Society that increasingly judges success based on personal achievement and appearance also encourages individuals to strive for perfection.

Hendarto and Ambarwati ([2020](#)) found that perfectionism influences psychological distress in Indonesian students. Similar findings were also demonstrated by Saraswati and Hernawa ([2022](#)), who found a positive relationship between perfectionism and stress during thesis writing. These results indicate that perfectionism is an important factor that needs to be considered in understanding the emergence of psychological distress in students.

Although perfectionism involves high standards and highly critical self-evaluation, there is a gap in understanding why its impact varies across individuals, which is strongly suspected to be related to the role of self-esteem (Park et al., [2010](#)). According to Rosenberg ([1965](#)), self-esteem is defined as the positive or negative evaluation an individual makes of themselves. Self-esteem plays a crucial role, with individuals with high self-esteem having a positive view of themselves. They recognize their strengths and consider them more important than their

weaknesses. Conversely, individuals with low self-esteem tend to view themselves negatively and focus more on their weaknesses. This is because self-esteem is the foundation of mental health (Beck, 1974; Kernis, 1989), which is predicted by various dimensions of perfectionism (Ashby & Rice, 2002; Molnar et al., 2006). Low self-esteem is known to be associated with poorer psychological adjustment and can increase the risk of psychological distress in individuals, because individuals with low self-esteem tend to be dissatisfied with their achievements and are more susceptible to emotional stress (Park et al., 2010).

Research by Santoso et al. (2020) found that higher levels of perfectionism led to lower self-esteem in college students. This finding is supported by the meta-analysis by Khossousi et al. (2024), which showed that the perfectionistic concerns dimension had a significant negative relationship with self-esteem. Furthermore, low self-esteem is known to be associated with increased levels of various psychological problems, such as depression and stress (Aditomo and Retnowati, 2004). Research on the role of self-esteem as a mediator in the relationship between perfectionism and psychological problems has yielded inconsistent results. Rice et al. (1998) found that self-esteem mediated the relationship between perfectionism and depression. Similar results were also found by Moroz and Dunkley (2015), who showed that low self-esteem is a mechanism explaining the relationship between perfectionism and depressive symptoms. However, a different finding was reported by Park et al. (2010), who found no direct mediating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress. In this study, self-esteem only played a role after maladaptive coping mechanisms had been addressed. The discrepancies in these research findings suggest that the role of self-esteem in the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress requires further study.

Based on the above discussion, there is a research gap indicating that, although the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress has been extensively studied, research examining self-esteem as a mediating mechanism among college students writing their theses remains limited. Furthermore, previous research findings regarding the mediating role of self-esteem have not yet yielded consistent conclusions. Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of self-esteem as a mediator in the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress among college students writing their theses. Additionally, this study aims to investigate the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress, as well as the relationship between perfectionism and self-esteem. Based on these objectives, the following hypotheses are proposed: perfectionism is associated with psychological distress; self-esteem is associated with

psychological distress; perfectionism has a negative relationship with self-esteem; and self-esteem mediates the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress.

Method

This study utilized a quantitative correlational research design to investigate the relationships between perfectionism, self-esteem, and psychological distress among college students who were in the process of completing their theses. The study specifically aimed to examine the direct relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress, as well as the mediating role of self-esteem in this relationship. Accordingly, perfectionism was designated as the independent variable, psychological distress as the dependent variable, and self-esteem as the mediating variable.

The participants in this study consisted of 361 college students in Indonesia who were writing their theses. Sampling was conducted using purposive sampling, with the primary criterion being that participants were active students currently writing their theses. The demographic characteristics collected included age, gender, region of origin, and the semester in which they were writing their thesis. Before administering the questionnaire, the researcher ensured compliance with research ethics by including an informed consent form at the beginning of the Google Form.

More specifically, the average age of the participants was 22.02 years ($SD = 1.12$), with an age range of 20–25 years. In addition, the participants were predominantly female (79.8%) compared to male (20.2%). The estimated sample size was determined using G*Power analysis with a linear multiple regression approach. Based on the R^2 value of 0.249 from a previous study, converted to Cohen's $f^2 \approx 0.33$, with $\alpha = 0.05$ and power = 0.90, the minimum required sample size was estimated to be approximately 60–70 participants. However, since this study employed a mediation model, a sample size of more than 100 participants was recommended. The number of participants in this study was 361, which was deemed sufficient.

Distress was measured using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21) developed by Lovibond & Lovibond (1995). This scale consists of 21 items that measure three dimensions—depression, anxiety, and stress—using a four-point Likert scale (1 = Very Rarely, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Often, and 4 = Very Often). Construct validity testing indicates that the DASS-21 possesses adequate psychometric properties as a multidimensional scale among young adults in Indonesia (Hakim & Aristawati, 2023). In this study, reliability test results showed excellent internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.939. Construct validity testing showed that the Indonesian version of the DASS-21 has a three-factor structure (depression,

anxiety, and stress) with good model fit following modifications (RMSEA = 0.072; SRMR = 0.045; CFI = 0.914; TLI = 0.901) (Hakim & Aristawati, [2023](#)).

The variable of perfectionism was measured using the Multidimensional Perfectionism Cognitions Inventory-English (MPCI-E) developed by Stoeber et al. ([2010](#)). This instrument was adapted into Indonesian using the back-to-back translation technique to ensure equivalence of meaning between the original and translated versions. The MPCI consists of 15 items and covers three dimensions: personal standards, pursuit of perfection, and concern over mistakes, using a four-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree). In this study, reliability test results indicated good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.869. Validity test results using CFA showed that the MPCI-E has a three-factor structure with intercorrelated factors and good model fit indices (CFI = 0.942; NNFI = 0.930; RMSEA = 0.061), making it suitable for use as a measure of multidimensional perfectionism (Stoeber et al., [2010](#)).

The self-esteem variable was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), developed by Rosenberg and adapted by Maroqi ([2019](#)), which consists of 10 items on a four-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree). Some items are phrased in a negative manner, so reverse scoring was applied before calculating the total score. Additionally, the results of the Indonesian adaptation indicate that this scale has high construct reliability (Alwi & Razak, [2022](#)). In this study, the reliability test results showed good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.803. Validity test results using CFA showed that the Indonesian-adapted version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale has adequate model fit with values of GFI = 0.92, CFI = 0.99, and SRMR = 0.06 (Alwi & Razak, [2022](#)).

Data collection was conducted online using Google Forms. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were provided with an explanation of the research objectives and an informed consent form. After agreeing to participate, respondents completed the questionnaire, which consisted of demographic data and three research instruments. The collected data was then reviewed to ensure the completeness of the responses before further analysis was conducted.

Data analysis was conducted using JASP software version 0.95.4.0 to test the research hypotheses. In the initial stage, Pearson's correlation test was performed to examine the relationship between perfectionism, self-esteem, and distress. Next, the hypotheses were tested using path analysis-based mediation analysis with the Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimator. Inferential analysis was conducted by testing the direct path coefficients to examine the relationship between perfectionism and distress (H1), self-esteem and distress (H2), and

perfectionism and self-esteem (H3). Subsequently, mediation analysis was used to test the role of self-esteem as a mediator in the relationship between perfectionism and distress (H4) by estimating the direct effect, indirect effect, and total effect, along with z-scores, p-values, and 95% confidence intervals to determine the significance of the relationships among the variables.

Result

Before testing the hypotheses, assumption tests were first conducted to ensure the suitability of the data to be analyzed. One of the assumptions examined was the normality of the data distribution for each research variable. The results of the normality test are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test

Variables	W	P	Description
Distres	0,956	< 0,001	Abnormal
Perfectionism	0,963	< 0,001	Abnormal
Self-esteem	0,984	< 0,001	Abnormal

Based on Table 1, the results of the Shapiro-Wilk normality test show a p-value of < 0.001, indicating a deviation from the normal distribution. However, with a large sample size, this test tends to be sensitive, so the data can still be considered approximately normal. In addition, the analysis used a bootstrapping approach with 5,000 samples, which does not rely on the assumption of normality. The linearity test indicates that the relationship between the variables is linear.

In addition to checking for normality, regression assumption tests were also conducted to ensure there were no multicollinearity issues among the predictor variables. The tests were performed using the Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values. The test results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Multicollinearity Test

Predictor Variables	Tolerance	VIF	Description
Perfectionism	0,943	1,060	There is no multicollinearity
Self-esteem	0,943	1,060	There is no multicollinearity

Based on Table 2, all predictor variables have Tolerance values above 0.10 and VIF values below 5. These results indicate that there is no evidence of multicollinearity in the research model. Furthermore, the scatterplot analysis shows that the residuals are randomly distributed, indicating that the assumption of homoscedasticity is also met.

The participants' characteristics were analyzed to provide an overview of the profiles of the respondents involved in the study. The information presented includes the participants' gender and semester. The distribution of the participants' characteristics is shown in Table 3.

Table 3.
Overview of Study Participants (N=361)

Characteristics	Category	Total	Percentage
Gender	Male	73	20,22%
	Female	288	79,78%
Semester	5	1	0,3%
	6	1	0,3%
	7	173	47,9%
	8	84	23,3%
	9	42	11,6%
	10	20	5,5%
	11	24	6,6%
	12	7	1,9%
	13	9	2,5%

According to Table 3, the majority of participants were female (79.8%), while males accounted for 20.2%. In terms of academic semesters, the majority of participants were in their 7th semester (47.9%) and 8th semester (23.3%), indicating that most respondents were in the early stages of writing their theses.

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationships among the study variables prior to testing the mediation model. The correlation results between perfectionism, self-esteem, and psychological distress are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.
Correlation Matrix for Distress, Perfectionism, and Self-Esteem

Variables	Distress	Perfectionism	Self-esteem
Distres	-		
Perfectionism	0,435***	-	
Self-esteem	-0,539***	-0,238***	-

Based on Table 4, which presents the results of the Pearson correlation test, perfectionism has a significant positive relationship with distress ($r = 0.435$; $p < .001$), indicating that the higher the level of perfectionism, the higher the level of distress experienced by students. Self-esteem has a significant negative relationship with distress ($r = -0.539$; $p < .001$), meaning that the higher the self-esteem, the lower the level of distress. In addition, self-esteem also correlates significantly and negatively with perfectionism ($r = -0.238$; $p < .001$), indicating that an increase in perfectionism tends to be followed by a decrease in self-esteem. These findings support the hypothesis that self-esteem plays a role in the relationship between perfectionism and distress.

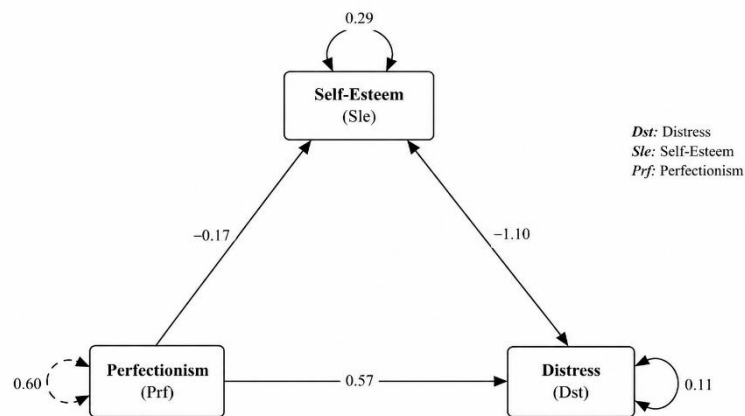


Figure 1. Mediation model of the effect of perfectionism on distress via self-esteem

To test the role of self-esteem as a mediator in the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress, a mediation analysis was conducted using a path analysis approach. The mediation model tested is shown in Figure 1, while the estimated path coefficients and the direct, indirect, and total effects are presented in Table 5.

Table 5.
Path Coefficients of the Mediation Model

Track	B	SE	z	p
Perfectionism → Self-esteem	-0.168	0.038	-4.414	< .001
Self-esteem → Distres Psikologis	-1.145	0.099	-11.506	< .001
Perfectionism → Distres Psikologis	0.572	0.084	6.809	< .001

Based on Table 5, perfectionism has a significant negative effect on self-esteem ($B = -0.168$; $p < .001$). This finding indicates that the higher a student's level of perfectionism, the lower their level of self-esteem. Furthermore, self-esteem has a significant negative effect on psychological distress ($B = -1.145$; $p < .001$), indicating that students with higher self-esteem tend to experience lower levels of psychological distress. Additionally, perfectionism had a significant positive effect on psychological distress ($B = 0.572$; $p < .001$). Thus, the higher a student's level of perfectionism, the higher their level of psychological distress.

To test the hypothesis regarding the mediating role of self-esteem in the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress, a mediation analysis was conducted to evaluate the direct effect, indirect effect, and total effect. The significance of the mediating effect was determined based on the confidence intervals of the bootstrap results. The results of the mediation analysis are presented in Table 6.

Table 6.
Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of the Mediation Model

Effects	B	SE	z	p	95% CI
Direct Effect	0.572	0.084	6.809	< .001	[0.397, 0.725]
Indirect Effect	0.193	0.045	4.278	< .001	[0.108, 0.283]
Total Effect	0.765	0.083	9.186	< .001	[0.585, 0.931]

Based on Table 6, the direct effect of perfectionism on psychological distress was significant ($B = 0.572$; 95% CI [0.397, 0.725]). The indirect effect of perfectionism on psychological distress via self-esteem was also significant ($B = 0.193$; 95% CI [0.108, 0.283]), as indicated by the confidence interval that does not include zero. The total effect of perfectionism on psychological distress was also significant ($B = 0.765$; 95% CI [0.585, 0.931]). These findings indicate that self-esteem acts as a partial mediator in the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress, meaning that perfectionism influences psychological distress both directly and through reduced self-esteem.

Discussion

The results of this study show that perfectionism has a significant positive effect on psychological distress among college students who are writing their theses. These findings indicate that the higher the tendency toward perfectionism, the higher the level of distress experienced. These findings can be explained by the nature of the thesis writing process, which is often characterized by academic demands, time pressure, and high expectations—both from oneself and from the surrounding environment (Anjarwati & Noorrizki, 2024). In such situations, the high standards held by perfectionists can actually become a source of additional pressure. These findings align with previous research showing a positive relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress among college students (Hendarto & Ambarwati, 2020; Saraswati & Hernawa, 2022). This relationship suggests that the influence of perfectionism on psychological distress stems not only from the high standards set by the individual but also from how the individual interprets their achievements. Students writing their theses are often faced with repeated revisions, uncertainty regarding research results, and the pressure to complete their studies on time. For individuals with a high tendency toward perfectionism, these conditions can be perceived as a threat to their self-competence, thereby increasing the anxiety, frustration, and psychological stress they experience.

More specifically, individuals with perfectionism tend to set high standards and have a tendency to over-evaluate themselves. When these standards are not met, recurring feelings of dissatisfaction with oneself arise, leading to emotional distress. This mechanism is explained in

the cognitive model of perfectionism, which emphasizes a cycle involving unrealistic standards, failure, and constant self-criticism (Shafran et al., [2002](#)). In an academic context, this cycle becomes even more pronounced because students are in a competitive and demanding environment, which increases their vulnerability to psychological distress (Gil et al., [2023](#); Pascoe et al., [2020](#)).

The results of this study also indicate that perfectionism has a negative effect on self-esteem. In other words, the higher the level of perfectionism, the lower an individual's self-esteem. This finding reinforces previous research showing that perfectionism is associated with lower self-esteem, particularly when individuals focus excessively on their own mistakes and shortcomings (Khossousi et al., [2024](#)). Furthermore, the gap between ideal standards and actual conditions can also give rise to feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, which ultimately lower one's self-evaluation (Aditomo & Retnowati, [2004](#)). Other studies have also found that individuals with high levels of perfectionism tend to experience self-dissatisfaction, which leads to low self-esteem (Santoso & Astuti, [2020](#)). These findings indicate that perfectionist students tend to view academic achievement as the primary basis for assessing their self-worth. When the results they obtain do not meet their set standards, these individuals are more prone to experiencing self-dissatisfaction and perceiving themselves as less competent. Consequently, their self-esteem becomes more vulnerable to decline, particularly when students face obstacles during the thesis writing process.

On the other hand, self-esteem in this study was found to have a negative effect on psychological distress. Individuals with high self-esteem tend to be better able to cope with stress and have a more stable self-image, making them less susceptible to the effects of failure or external demands. Conversely, individuals with low self-esteem are more vulnerable to emotional distress. This aligns with the view that self-esteem is a key factor in mental health, where low self-esteem is associated with increased vulnerability to psychological disorders (Beck, [1974](#); Kernis, [1989](#)). Other empirical findings also indicate that increased self-esteem is associated with reduced psychological distress among college students (Gustina, [2019](#)). Self-esteem can be viewed as a psychological resource that helps individuals cope with various academic demands. Students with high self-esteem tend to believe that they are capable of overcoming difficulties that arise during the thesis writing process. Conversely, students with low self-esteem are more likely to interpret academic obstacles as evidence of their own incompetence, making them more prone to psychological distress.

The main finding of this study is that self-esteem acts as a partial mediator in the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress. The finding of partial mediation indicates that the effect of perfectionism on psychological distress is not entirely direct, but is partially mediated by self-esteem. In other words, the tendency to set excessively high standards can influence how individuals evaluate themselves. When these standards are not met, individuals become more critical of themselves, experience a decline in self-esteem, and ultimately become more vulnerable to psychological distress. These results support the view that self-esteem is one of the psychological mechanisms that explains how perfectionism develops into a maladaptive psychological experience. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that self-esteem mediates the relationship between perfectionism and depression among college students in China (Chai et al., [2020](#)). Similar results were also found in studies indicating that perfectionism can increase depression through reduced self-esteem (Rice & Ashby, [1998](#)).

In this study, self-esteem acted as a partial mediator, not a full mediator. This indicates that there are still other factors that help explain the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress. Several previous studies have revealed that the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress can also be explained by other factors, such as maladaptive coping strategies, ineffective emotional regulation, low self-compassion, and low social support (Park et al., [2010](#)). Therefore, self-esteem can be understood as one of the mechanisms explaining this relationship, but it is not the only factor at play. Thus, the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress can be said to be complex and to involve various psychological mechanisms.

This study makes a theoretical contribution by demonstrating that self-esteem is one of the psychological mechanisms that explains the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress among college students writing their theses. Unlike some previous studies, which have focused primarily on direct relationships between variables, this study provides a deeper understanding of the psychological processes underlying the emergence of psychological distress among senior students. These findings also enrich the literature on student mental health in the context of writing a thesis, a topic that remains relatively under-explored in Indonesia. This contribution is significant because most previous studies have primarily examined the direct relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress, whereas research examining the mediating role of self-esteem among students writing their theses remains relatively limited.

Overall, the results of this study confirm that perfectionism plays a significant role in increasing psychological distress, both directly and indirectly through self-esteem. Therefore,

intervention efforts focused on improving self-esteem are important, especially for college students who are in the process of writing their theses.

Although this study measures perfectionism as a single construct, previous findings suggest that not all dimensions of perfectionism have the same psychological consequences. Dimensions related to concern over mistakes and negative self-evaluation tend to have a stronger association with psychological distress than dimensions focused on high personal standards. In the context of the instrument used in this study, the “concern over mistakes” dimension is hypothesized to have a stronger association with the emergence of psychological distress than the dimension focused on achieving personal standards. However, since this study did not analyze each dimension separately, this relationship cannot yet be confirmed and needs to be tested in future research so that the mechanisms underlying the emergence of psychological distress can be understood more comprehensively.

This study has several limitations. First, this study only examined self-esteem as a mediator; thus, it did not consider other variables that may also play a role in explaining the relationship between perfectionism and psychological distress. Second, this study used a cross-sectional design, which does not allow researchers to draw conclusions about direct causal relationships between variables. Furthermore, the majority of participants in this study were female; therefore, generalizing the findings to the broader student population should be done with caution. Consequently, future research is recommended to employ a longitudinal design, analyze the dimensions of perfectionism separately, and consider other variables to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying psychological distress among college students.

Conclusion

The results of the study show that perfectionism plays a role in increasing students’ psychological distress, both directly and indirectly through a decrease in self-esteem. These findings indicate that high self-standards and a tendency toward excessive self-evaluation can increase students’ vulnerability to psychological stress during the thesis writing process. Self-esteem was found to act as a partial mediator, meaning that low self-esteem reinforces the effect of perfectionism on distress, although this relationship is also influenced by other psychological factors. Therefore, efforts to assist senior students should focus not only on managing perfectionism but also on strengthening self-esteem. Future research is advised to consider a balanced set of characteristics to ensure more representative results and to include other

variables to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing students' psychological distress.

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