



## Procrastination: Serious Issue to Be Considered - A Review

M Snehitha<sup>1</sup>, RVS Krishna Kumar<sup>2</sup>, Gomasani Srinivasulu<sup>3</sup>, Athuluru Deepthi<sup>4</sup>,  
Veguru Prathyusha<sup>5</sup>, Punamalli Symon Prasanth<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Public Health Dentistry, Narayana Dental College and Hospital

<sup>2</sup>Department of Public Health Dentistry, Narayana Dental College and Hospital

<sup>3</sup>Department of Public Health Dentistry, Narayana Dental College and Hospital

<sup>4</sup>Department of Public Health Dentistry, Narayana Dental College and Hospital

<sup>5</sup>Department of Public Health Dentistry, Narayana Dental College and Hospital

<sup>6</sup>Department of Public Health Dentistry, Narayana Dental College and Hospital

Corresponding Author: M Snehitha

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Procrastination originates from the Latin roots of *pro* meaning “forward, forth” and *crastinus* which means “tomorrow. Procrastination is a current topic of interest across multiple fields, from finance (as people defer dealing with their financial troubles) to health care (as people delay seeing their physicians)<sup>1</sup>. The traditional definition of procrastination may be challenging for two reasons: first, its non-specific nature could be used to refer to aspects of a number of psychological disorders including anxiety and depression and the second reason is research on procrastination is ironically delayed and limited with regard to active research on what may be two separate aspects of procrastination<sup>2</sup>. Procrastination is an extremely prevalent phenomenon which is globally seen but equally likely unfavorable around the globe. It has been proposed that procrastination results from a combination of disbelieving in one’s own capability to perform task, being unable to postpone gratification and assigning blame for one’s own “predicament” to external sources<sup>3</sup>.

Every single human being either working or nonworking has to complete numerous tasks during a day, but for certain reasons completion of these tasks is delayed. This general tendency of delaying different task is referred as procrastination<sup>4</sup>. For some people, it is in their nature and they tend to procrastinate across most life situations (i.e., chronic procrastinators), while others tend to procrastinate in specific situations and specific domains<sup>5</sup>.

Procrastinators have sometimes been depicted as lazy individuals with an inability to self-regulate but non-procrastinators have been associated with high efficiency, productivity, and motivation. One form of procrastination is characteristic of people who do not intend to procrastinate, but do so due to a lack of time management, and that a second form of procrastination is typical of those who manage time efficiently yet choose to delay tasks to focus on more immediate, and perhaps more important tasks. These different clarifications have been labeled as passive procrastination and active procrastination respectively<sup>6</sup>.

Passive procrastinators do not intend to procrastinate, but they often end up delaying tasks because of their incapability to make decisions quickly and to thereby act on them quickly<sup>7</sup>. Active procrastinators, in contrast, are capable of acting on their decisions in a timely manner. However, they suspend their actions purposefully and focus their attention on other important tasks at hand. Affectively, when a deadline approaches, passive procrastinators feel stressed and become negative in their attitude, especially about their ability to achieve satisfactory results<sup>7</sup>.

Firstly, procrastination has been used for either dysfunctional forms or positive or strategic forms of delay, although it is *per se* dysfunctional because it implies an unnecessary delay and negative consequences with regard to performance and subjective well-being. Second, the construct has been connoted according to the assumed theoretical perspectives<sup>8</sup>. Procrastination has been regarded as a failure in motivation and volition, leading to the intention-action gap from the motivational and volitional perspective<sup>9</sup>. With regard to clinical perspective, the focus is on the clinically relevant extent of procrastination and on the link between procrastination and depression. Procrastination cannot be explained by one perspective alone<sup>8</sup>.

Procrastination has been shown to have a particular effect in academic settings, especially for students, whose lives are characterized by regular deadlines<sup>10</sup>. It is estimated that 80%–95% of college students engage in procrastination. Approximately 75% of them consider themselves as procrastinators, and almost 50% procrastinate constantly and problematically. In addition to being endemic during college, procrastination is also widespread in the general population, chronically affecting some 15%–20% of adults<sup>1</sup>.

Unfortunately, procrastination has been associated with numerous negative outcomes including neuroticism, depression, anxiety, impulsivity, aversiveness, task delay, and low self-efficacy & conscientiousness, distractibility, organization, achievement motivation, and poor academic performance. Hence, such negative outcomes are believed to interfere with task performance. Postponement of a task frequently leads to a bigger task and more severe problems like stress, a sense of guiltiness and crisis, severe loss of personal productivity, and social disapproval for not meeting responsibilities or commitments<sup>9</sup>. When these feelings are combined, they may help further to delay or procrastinate<sup>10</sup>. So this narrative review is aimed to provide an overview of the current understanding of procrastination.

## II. HISTORY

Historical references have indicated that views about procrastination have been reasonably constant over the ages: it is and has been a prevalent problem.

Procrastination parallels the evolution of human civilization and may have originated as early as 2.5 million years ago when our ancestors first grouped into small clans and someone decided to needlessly put off doing something relevant for the clan<sup>11</sup>.

In 44 B.C, Cicero was the consul of Rome, its highest political office, and an infamous orator who spoke against several political opponents, such as Marcus Antonius, who later had Cicero killed. In one of a series of speeches denouncing Antonius, Cicero stated, “in the conduct of almost every affair slowness and procrastination are hateful”<sup>12</sup>.

Stanford philosopher John Perry, author of the book *The Art Of Procrastination*<sup>13</sup>, has argued that people can hold up to their advantage by restructuring their to do lists so that they are always accomplishing something of value.

The first historical analysis on procrastination was written by Milgram<sup>9</sup>, who argued that technically advanced societies require numerous commitments and deadlines, which gives rise to procrastination.

Ferrari, Johnson and McCown<sup>14</sup> contended that procrastination has existed throughout history but that it only acquired truly negative connotations with the advent of the industrial revolution. Before then, procrastination was viewed neutrally and could be interpreted as a wise course of action.

Walker et al<sup>15</sup> has made it clear that procrastination is extremely sinful, that he and other ministers had rallied their congregations against it repeatedly, and that other texts were available that spoke similarly.

Stretching thousands of years ago, procrastination must be considered an almost archetypal human failing. Therefore it is rather surprising and ironic that science did not address procrastination sooner.

## III. TYPES OF PROCRASTINATION

### 1. Behavioral procrastination

Behavioral procrastination is observed in at least two ways. First, during action implementation, the person may divert to an alternative and more tempting course of action, indirectly delaying the original plan<sup>16</sup>. Second, in a longer time perspective, the negative consequences of such diversions become visible, as for example when people postpone seeing their doctors until treatment is no longer an option<sup>17</sup>.

### 2. Decisional procrastination

Decisional procrastination is post-poning a decision when faced with conflicts and choices. People who practice high level decisional procrastination tend to be afraid of errors and are likely to be perfectionists. Over informed decisional procrastinators run the danger of falling prey to further self- sabotage Strategy, called optional paralysis that they create so many choices for themselves that they feel unable to choose, for fear of choosing an option that is less than perfect<sup>18</sup>.

### 3. Workplace procrastination

Procrastination at workplace is often considered a sub-optimal behavior that increases employer costs due to shattered individual and organizational productivity<sup>19</sup>. Procrastination approximately consumes more than one fourth of most people’s working days. Thus, procrastinators tend to work in jobs that are lower in inherent rewarding attributes, that is, those providing less motivation while also fostering procrastination<sup>20</sup>.

### 4. Academic procrastination

Academic procrastination can be defined as the tendency to delay intended academic tasks, this may result in negative consequences<sup>5</sup>. Procrastination in academic settings has been found to be prevalent among students, across racial categories, and between genders<sup>21</sup>. Student procrastinators postpone academic assignments and

instead focus on unproductive activities that lead to lowered performance as well as negative emotional reactions, which eventually negatively affect their academic achievement<sup>19</sup>.

### **5. Chronic procrastination**

Chronic procrastination is a deliberate and repetitive postponement of either starting or finishing a task such that the delay leads to subjective discomfort. Conceptually, chronic procrastination is a self-regulatory failure that serves as a handicap such that procrastinators fail to steer their goal-directed activities towards healthy lifestyles<sup>19</sup>.

## **CAUSES OF PROCRASTINATION**

### **1. Fear of failure**

Procrastination is frequently a sign of fear of making mistakes. Often procrastinators have extremely high or unrealistic expectations of themselves that prevent them from undertaking tasks. Fear of making mistakes will ensure of never working up to the potential, and never maximize happiness.

### **2. Self-handicapping**

People sometimes procrastinate as a way of placing barriers in their own way, so that if they fail their failures could be attributed to procrastination rather than their abilities, a behavior which is referred to as *self-handicapping*.

### **3. Low self-efficacy**

*Self-efficacy* reflects a person's belief in their ability to successfully achieve their goals, and in some cases, having a low degree of self-efficacy can cause a person to procrastinate.

### **4. Depression**

Some people procrastinate because they suffer from underlying depression. This is because depression can lead to issues such as fatigue, difficulty in concentrating, and a reduced interest in activities, which in turn can cause people to procrastinate.

### **5. Impulsivity**

Impulsivity is strongly associated with the tendency to procrastinate, since the decision to procrastinate is often an impulsive one, such as when people ignore the long-term consequences of their actions, or when they fail to plan their work ahead of time.

### **6. Lack of perseverance**

Perseverance is the ability to maintain goal-driven behavior in the face of obstacles. A lack of perseverance makes people more likely to procrastinate, especially when it comes to finishing tasks that they've already started working on.

### **7. Lack of motivation**

When people are driven to complete a certain task by an external source of motivation, they generally display higher levels of procrastination than when they are driven by an internal and autonomous source of motivation.

Different people have different levels of general *achievement motivation*. Accordingly, those who have lower levels of achievement motivation are more likely to procrastinate on various tasks.

### **8. Perfectionism**

People sometimes procrastinate as a result of their perfectionism. The problem starts when perfectionists aim for unattainable flawlessness, which causes them to procrastinate by giving them a seemingly valid excuse for unnecessary delays<sup>22</sup>.

## **STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING PROCRASTINATION**

Strategies to overcome procrastination include overcoming avoidance, cognitive structure, and volition<sup>23</sup>.

### **Overcoming Avoidance**

Increased self-efficacy would decrease the likelihood of avoidance, when the procrastination can be traced to perceived incompetence. Making tasks more challenging in various ways apart from increasing time pressure would be useful in these tasks. It is also possible to train competencies relevant to self-regulation in general, such as self-knowledge, self-monitoring, feedback seeking, and awareness of the effect of one's behaviour.

### **Cognitive Structuring**

Planning is an effective strategy to overcome distraction. Plans may include three components: standards, monitoring, and strength. Plans structure self-control, or take into account other sources of control, such as social control and feedback from the environment. Time awareness is an important component for making realistic plans.

When tasks differ in importance, the most effective strategy is to prioritise the tasks according to importance, and to execute them as prioritised. Time management extends planning in terms of importance and time goals into a method which makes achievement of plans more likely.

Mental strategies imply that planning can be done cognitively, and need not be written down, as long as the mental simulation is concrete, specific, and involves the processes of attaining a goal, rather than the outcome of a goal.

#### **Strengthening Volition**

Increasing the perceived proximity and value of the avoided task, and decreasing the perceived proximity and value of the distraction may help to overcome procrastination.

When the avoided task is perceived as boring, strategies to increase interest may be used, such as finding meaning and variation in the simple task. A task that is avoided because it is too complex and too challenging may be made more tractable by creating proximal sub goals and setting shorter deadlines.

Limiting the likelihood of distraction is in general more easily achieved by temptation-inhibiting strategies than task-facilitating strategies. If distraction cannot be prevented, it may be effective to think of one other thing, instead of engaging in unfocused distraction, as preoccupation with the avoided thought appears to decrease when it is replaced by one other thought<sup>23</sup>.

### **IV. DISCUSSION**

Efforts to understand procrastination have been intensive, with hundreds of studies covering a wide range of situations and variables. Procrastinators tend to choose short-term benefits over long-term gains, reflecting a core component of poor self-regulation<sup>24</sup>. Numerous studies support the notion that procrastination, far from being a laughing matter, is a destructive force in many lives.

Procrastination appears to be fairly evenly distributed by gender. Considering the difference between academic procrastination in girls and boys, the researchers are ambiguous. Solomon and Rothblum<sup>25</sup> indicate lack of meaningful difference between gender and academic procrastination and some other considers men procrastinate more. Bidjerano<sup>26</sup> shows girls meaningfully use rehearsal strategies more often than boys. Men may score higher, lower, or the same as women depending on the measure. However, meta-analytic results do show that girls score higher on effortful control than boys.

Age has a negative relationship with procrastination. As most people get older, they can better evaluate the benefits of the present and future. By increasing age, sensitivity to delay is decreased which causes the utility of a task to increase.

According to Flett<sup>27</sup> procrastinators have low self-esteem due to their low self-efficacy. Howell, Watson, Powell, and Buro<sup>28</sup> found self-efficacy as the strongest predictor of academic procrastination among the other variables. Chu and Choi<sup>7</sup> declared procrastination as a form of failure in academic self-efficacy for self-regulated learning. Work by Hajloo<sup>29</sup> concluded that self-esteem mediated the relationship between self-efficacy and trait procrastination.

Procrastination can play out as impulsivity and distractibility as well. It should be noted, however, that DeWitte and Schouwenburg<sup>30</sup> claim that “previous evidence on the role of impulsivity in procrastination is ambiguous”. As for distractibility, this has been identified by Haycock<sup>31</sup> as one of the top reasons for procrastination.

Zimmerman<sup>32</sup> believes that self-regulated learners who rarely procrastinate; in the first stage of their activities do valuation and strategic planning. Wolters<sup>33</sup> demonstrates that those who have mastery- approach goals don't postpone their tasks. The results obtained from the studies done by Rakes & dunn<sup>34</sup> considered internal motivation against external motivation effective on academic procrastination.

Planning can reduce procrastination to a great extent. Developing the skills for time management has strong correlation with academic achievement, enhanced self- esteem, lower level of learned disability, more appreciating feeling, and internal controlling.

As the axiom suggests, “old habits die hard”, the best way to avoid raising future procrastinators may be by educating parents, teachers, and children about the pros and cons of delaying behaviors so that delaying habits are crushed before they develop.

### **V. CONCLUSION**

Procrastination has been with humankind for countless eras. Looking towards tomorrow, procrastination does not appear to be leaving us anytime soon. Prevention, treatment or elimination of procrastination is no easy task, and no simple solutions are at hand. The problem manifests in similar ways, yet finds different motivations in different individuals.

### **VI. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- For preventive measures, future studies are needed to explore connections of parental upbringing and later adult delaying behaviours.
- Longitudinal studies comprised of both parents and children can give a clear picture of the familial roots of procrastination.

- The relevance of academic procrastination in the understanding of academic misconduct should be continuously observed and confirmed in future studies due to the need to evaluate the effect of counter-measures and changing study environments.
- Future studies are recommended regarding different interventions to be applied to help students to decrease their procrastination habit.

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